25 CENTS
VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1
POSTAGE PAID AT MONTREAL
12½P. IN U.K.

TAKE ONE

GROUCHO MARX
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS AN OLD MAN

arcmt 2021

Janus
Film Library
Presents A collection of
brilliant short films
by the directors
of the 60's
(and 70's)

Cinema is the new language of our time, the youngest and most vital of the arts. One of the most exciting expressions is to be found in the short film.

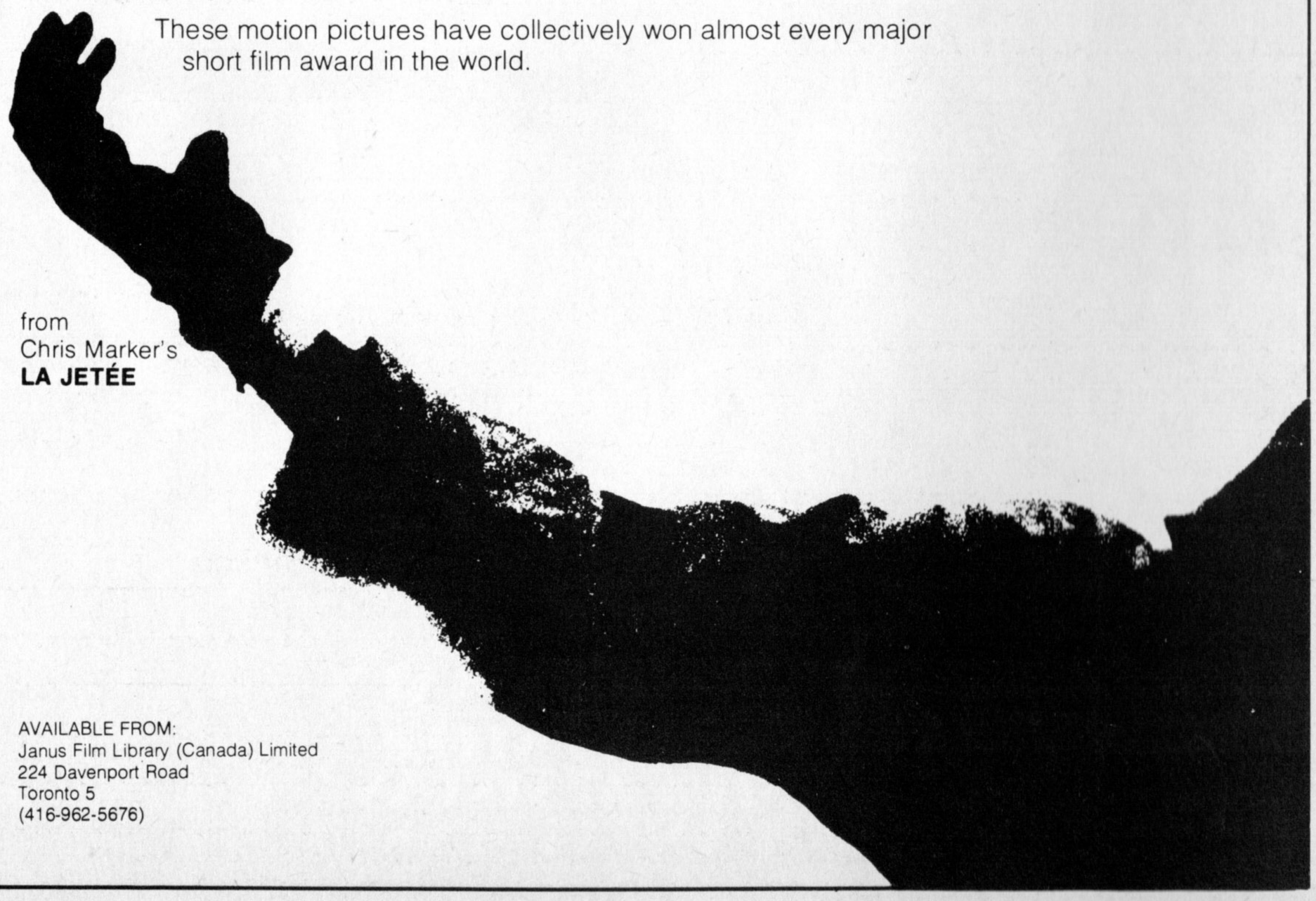
Distinguished directors, such as Godard, Polanski, Lester, and Truffaut developed their individual styles in the short film.

Brilliant young talents, many as yet unknown in this country, have created personal works of dazzling virtuosity and imagination.

Their showing in Canada is long overdue.

In addition to Polanski's **The Fat and the Lean** and Marker's **La Jetée,** the following films are included: **Enter Hamlet** (Mogubgub, USA), **Actua-Tilt** (Jean Herman, France), **Two Castles** (Bruno Bozzetto, Italy), **Corrida Interdite** (Denys Colomb de Daunant, France), **Maschine** (Wolfgang Urchs, Germany), **Allures** (Jordan Belson, USA), and **The Dove** (George Coe, USA).

These motion pictures have collectively won almost every major short film award in the world.



from
Chris Marker's
LA JETÉE

AVAILABLE FROM:
Janus Film Library (Canada) Limited
224 Davenport Road
Toronto 5
(416-962-5676)

arcmt 2021

TAKE ONE

EDITOR/PUBLISHER: Peter Lebensold
ASSOCIATE ED/PUB.: Joe Medjuck
MANAGING EDITOR: Michael Goodwin
ART DIRECTOR: Gerry Lorange
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Ronald Blumer, Clive Denton, Gordon Hitchens, John Hofsess, Bruce Martin.
BOOK EDITOR: Glen Hunter
CORRESPONDENTS: *Berlin* Gunter Knorr; *Budapest* Elizabeth Szasz; *Chicago* Don B. Klugman; *Lisbon* Vasco Granja; *London* Suzanne Budgen, Mark Forstater; *Copenhagen* Viggo Holm Jensen & Vibeke Pedersen; *Los Angeles* Tony Reif, John H. Dorr; *Madrid* Carmen Anthony; *Montreal* Marc Gervais; *New York* Jay Cocks, Bob Cowan, Susan Rice; *Paris* Geoffrey Minish; *San Francisco* Hal Aigner, John Bigby; *Stockholm* Lars-Olaf Lothwall, Bob Nichols; *Vancouver* Kirk Tougas; *Wales* Bill Sherman
BUSINESS MANAGER: Tom Lewis
ASS'T TO PUBLISHER: Maisie Wetherill

TAKE ONE is published bi-monthly by Unicorn Publishing Corp., Post Office Box 1778, Station B, Montreal 110, Canada. **Subscription rates:** North America, 12 issues for $3.00; Overseas, 12 issues for $5.00. Airmail: Add 30 cents per issue (North America) and 50 cents per issue (Overseas). Subscriptions sent free to individuals at prison addresses. **Notice of change of address** should include your old address on the mailing label of a recent issue; allow four weeks for processing. **Editorial information:** All manuscripts, drawings and photographs submitted must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. While the editors will take all reasonable care, they will not be held responsible for the loss of any such submissions. **Index:** This publication is indexed in the *Canadian Periodical Index*. Second class mail registration number 1899. Printed at Montreal, Canada.

Printed in Canada. Issue of Sept-Oct 1970; published December 8, 1971.

Copyright © 1971 by Unicorn Publishing Corp. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photo-copying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publisher. Opinions expressed herein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the editors or publishers of TAKE ONE. Published with the financial assistance of The Canada Council, The Province of Ontario Council for the Arts, and The Canadian Film Development Corp.

Business	4	Feed-Back
	5	Festivals & Competitions
		Classifieds
		News
Features	6	Stan Brakhage: Some Remarks
	10	Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man *by Robert Altman, Jon Carroll, Michael Goodwin*
	18	Duck Soup for the Rest of Your Life *by Joe Adamson*
	22	Claude Chabrol *by Noah James*
Reviews	25	Mon Oncle Antoine *by Ronald Blumer*
		Vanishing Point *by Jon Carroll*
	26	Derby *by Michael Desilets*
	29	Rip-Off *by John Hofsess*
		Sweet Sweetback *by James Monaco*
Departments	32	In The Works
	33	Berlin Letter *by Ron Holloway*
	35	Toronto Letter *by Kirwan Cox*
		Reflections on the Current Scene *by Herman Weinberg*
	36	New York Letter *by Bob Cowan*
	37	Books *by William T. Murphy*

FEEDBACK

TAKE ONE welcomes communications from its readers, but can rarely accommodate letters over 500 words in length. The editors assume that any letter received (unless otherwise stated) is free for publication.

Re: Geneviève Bujold

The article "Geneviève" in your vol. 2, no. 11 issue fails to mention Michel Brault's **Entre la mer et l'eau douce** which featured Miss Bujold and Claude Gauthier. Since this film was made in 1967, I assume that you were not including it among the "low budget, separatist" films in which Miss Bujold acted at age 21.

Both as cameraman and director, Brault occupies a notable place in the history of Canadian film, and his work deserves as much notice as — for example — the films of Paul Almond. **Entre la mer . . .** is especially significant in an article on Geneviève Bujold since Brault captured the essence of Miss Bujold's charm by using her to portray a Montreal waitress. Rather than queens or saints, car-hops and East-end waitresses represent the type of vulnerability that Miss Bujold projects with great skill and sympathy.

R. J. Taylor
Ottawa, Ontario

I want to thank whomever was responsible for the article on Geneviève Bujold in Vol. 2, No. 11. The photographs by Vittorio were beautifully done. I am a great admirer of Geneviève Bujold — she is a fantastic actress. Director Louis Malle may equate her with Jeanne Moreau and Julie Christie, but I would put her far above them or any other contemporary film actress.

Virginia Phillips
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

In a Canadian magazine, in a piece that seems to purport to give a pretty complete rundown on her film career, it's surprising that there is no mention of Genevieve Bujold's early feature movies (in both of which she had starring roles): **Amanita Pestilens** and **Entre la mer et l'eau douce.** While not masterworks, they had definite qualities; while no doubt "low-budget" they were well-made: and in no way were they "separatist films".

Re. John Hofsess' tirade against Canadian critics, I'm a bit unsure about just what he wants of them. Quote: "They point in one direction and thousands are advised to see **The Wild Child**". What should they do—pretend they didn't like it and warn us not to see it? Quote: "They hold up their hands (in mock horror) and try to block the flow of crowds intent upon seeing **Heads or Tails**"—whatever *that* is; perhaps another bit of whimsy like Greil Marcus pretending he thought **Performance** was called **Memo from Turner.** Anyway, I've yet to note a case of any critic blocking a flow of crowds intent upon seeing *anything*—**Love Story** is a classic example.

And what the *hell* does Miss Susan Rice mean by her phrase "elaborate Jewish sick jokes (other than World War II)"?! Could be the lady needs medical attention.

G. G. Patterson
Toronto 6, Ontario

Re: Pentagon censorship

In 1945 the United States War Department commissioned a theatrical short film explaining the rehabilitation of nervous and emotional casualties of World War II.

The director they chose was Major John Huston, U.S. Army.

Twenty-six years later, the result, **Let There Be Light,** is still banned (by the Pentagon) from public viewing. The only hint at what it reveals about the mind-bending effects of war is the transcribed sound track of the film, published in *Film: Book 2, Films of Peace and War,* edited by Robert Hughes, Grove Press Inc., 1962.

In a 1960 interview with Hughes, Huston said: "I always thought it was the most, you know, the most hopeful and optimistic and even joyous thing I ever had a hand in. And so I was shocked when the army took its stand on the film. I never dreamed they would ban it."

Why was the film suppressed? Again Huston: "It was banned, I believe, because the War Department felt it was too strong medicine . . . the fact that war can do such things to people's emotions and nerves."

James Agee, commenting on the War Department's reasons, said: "The glaring obvious reason has not been mentioned: that any sane human being who saw the film would join the armed services, if at all, with a straight face and a painfully maturing mind."

The only time **Let There Be Light** was almost shown was several years ago at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, after Huston persuaded Army public relations to let it be seen by a small group. Just as the film was to be projected, however, MPs arrived and seized it. Years ago, New York film distributor Arthur Mayer battled authorities to get the film released. He was unsuccessful.

The film has been preserved, according to the Museum of Modern Art. A strong letter-writing campaign could re-start the plea for its release. Letters should be written to: General William Westmoreland, Army Chief of Staff; The N.Y. Times; other film journals; film critics and anti-war organizations.

David Batterson
Sand Springs, Okla.

Re: Polaroid's non-poisonous tabs

Your Volume 2, No. 10 of TAKE ONE carried an article on the inside cover about Polaroid film tabs being poisonous to wild life and causing the deaths of some 400 animals.

The information is inaccurate, and since the article creates a doubt in the mind of the public as to the safety of Polaroid film products, we would appreciate your assistance in helping to publicize the correct facts.

You will note from the enclosed article that we have undertaken extensive tests on the film discard material and have ascertained that it does not contain hazardous substances. As the article points out, neither the National Park Services nor the U.S. Forest Service has any data which would suggest that the film discard is poisonous, nor do they have any knowledge of wildlife deaths resulting from the ingestion of the discard material.

An article in the Ottawa *Citizen* (May 29, 1971) reports that the Canadian Wildlife Service also concurs with our findings and those of the other agencies concerning the non-toxic qualities of the discard material.

Given the support of our findings which we have received from the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service, I am sure you can understand our interest in correcting the misinformation and doubts about the safety of Polaroid film products which have resulted from publication of the article in TAKE ONE.

We do not feel that we are unreasonable in requesting that you publish an accurate, corrected story in a future issue of TAKE ONE, and I look forward to hearing from you by return mail concerning your intentions in this regard.

We are concerned about the indiscriminate littering done by Polaroid camera owners and have taken a number of steps to encourage them to properly dispose of the discard material. We have run several network television commercials which incorporate an anti-litter message. We have printed the message 38 times in each pack of film (see enclosure), and we have devoted a full page to the subject in many of our camera instruction books. We are redesigning the graphics of the foil package around the film to illustrate it may be used as a litter bag, and we are making a technical change in the foil wrap so that it will zip open to become a container for the discard material.

We have offered our assistance to the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Canadian Wildlife Service on programs designed to acquaint the public with the major problem which littering represents in national and provincial parks and forests.

Anne Snider (Mrs.)
Communications Manager
Polaroid Corporation of Canada
Rexdale, Ontario

Re: Ourselves

Thank you for keeping your prices low enough so that film students can afford to buy it. TAKE ONE has been extremely helpful to me in my own televised film reviews and in preparing for a class I will be teaching at the Free University.

Bill Pace
Takom Park, Maryland

I've been obeying the behest printed on the front of your excellent publication for some time now. However, my friendly newsdealer is not so friendly any more and I no longer see the magazine on his racks, so I suppose I'll have to subscribe like anybody else.

You have a fine magazine and I hope you can keep it up.

Tom R. Rice
Los Altos, Calif.

NEXT ISSUE: WOMEN IN FILMS

Articles, personal statements, interviews, reviews.

Watch for it next month!

2021

FESTIVALS & COMPETITIONS

The Second **New England Student Film Festival** is set to take place December 3, 4 and 5 of this year at MIT. For further information, contact: Hugh Evans, Executive Secretary, University Film Study Center, Box 275, Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

April 24 through 29th witnesses the 18th **International Festival of Short Films** at Oberhausen. Films (not exceeding 36 minutes running time) are accepted provided they have not previously been screened in West Germany. Entry forms should be returned before March 31 and can be obtained from the festival office at Schwartzstrasse 71, 42 Oberhausen 1, West Germany.

Movies on a Shoestring (The Rochester International Amateur Film Festival) is looking for films (that have not been made for theatrical or commercial entertainment) for its 14th annual show (to be held April 29). Closing date for submissions is March 18. Write: Movies on a Shoestring, P.O. Box 7604, Rochester, N.Y. 14622.

The First **Tehran International Film Festival** is to be held April 16 through 26th. There will be a competition (a maximum of 20 features and 20 short films are to be accepted for competition), retrospective programmes and a film market as well. Governments, national associations, specialized organizations and individual producers wishing to enter films for consideration should fill in and return (no later than February 4th) the forms that can be obtained from: The Secretary General, First Tehran International Film Festival, Ministry of Culture and Arts, Tehran, Iran.

The **USA Film Festival** (to be held March 19 through 25th) is looking for motion pictures of any kind and length (except commercials and industrial films as such) directed by a U.S. citizen for consideration by the selection committee (which includes critics Sheldon Renan, Rex Reed, Manny Farber and onetime TAKE ONE contributor Jay Cocks). There are entry fees of $10 (for films under 60 minutes long) and $25 (for films 60 minutes and over). Write: USA Film Festival, Meadows School of the Arts, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas 75222. Entry deadline is February 1st.

In announcing the winners of six new awards to independent filmmakers (totalling $46,000) the **American Film Institute** has invited applications for the next cycle of awards — which are to be presented in February. Deadline for application is December 31st, and forms may be obtained from: The American Film Institute, 501 Doheny Road, Beverly Hills, California 90210.

Other festivals to keep in mind are: **The American Film Festival**, 17 West 60 Street, New York, NY 10023; **The Western Heritage Awards** (for films and tv shows dealing with the American West), 1700 N.E. 63rd, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73111; **The Independent Film-Makers Festival** (with cash awards), Foothill Junior College, 12345 El Monte Road, Los Altos, Calif. 94022; **The Ann Arbor Film Festival** (also with cash awards), P.O. Box 283, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107; and the prestigious **Spoleto Cinema Festival of the Two Words** (takes place in June), Spoleto, Italy.

classifieds

$5 for 25 words or less (20 cents a word thereafter). Rates for more than one insertion on request.

TAKE ONE Vol. 1, No. 2 wanted. Write to G. L. George, 685 West End Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10025.

STEENBECK 16/35 for rent. Nights only, on our premises. 416-920-3495 (Toronto).

NEWS

This past August, the Venice Film Festival made a great to-do about the fact that the Peoples Republic of China would "for the first time participate in an international motion picture event". We are reminded that films from Peking have been featured at the biennial presentations of the Yorkton International Documentary Film Festival as far back as 1962 and 1964. The films were **On Night Duty** (about the nocturnal adventures of an owl), **Landscape Painting,** and **Great Hall of the People** (on the People's Palace). The records reveal that none of these submissions won an award. Though there were no films from China in this year's festival (held October 20 to 22nd), more than 80 films were submitted, representing some dozen or so countries around the world (as well, as Canada, of course). Yorkton, Saskatchewan has a population of 15,000; the festival receives absolutely no government support of any kind.

A new film magazine has been born: *The Journal of Popular Film.* A quarterly to be published by the Center for the Study of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University, the magazine will study popular film in the broadest sense of the term. Concentration will be upon commercial cinema — stars, directors, individual films, and genres — and the publication is to be edited by Michael T. Marsden, Samuel Grogg Jr., and John G. Nachbar. Subscriptions (at $4 a year), manuscripts, books for review and all other correspondence should be directed to: Journal of Popular Film, 101 University Hall, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403.

2 FILMS BY MORLEY MARKSON

The Tragic Diary of Zero, the fool.
First Prize, Ann Arbor Film Festival, 1970, and at six other American film festivals.

". . . we waited for lightning to strike, and . . . finally it did . . . I have since tried to convey the genius of this overwhelming film to a number of people but have failed, for in summary, everything in it dissolves into insubstantiality . . . masterful films like this do not just happen." (New Cinema Review)

Zero, the Fool is Morley Markson's first feature film. Markson previously was a designer and photographer: geodesic domes, inventions, machines, industrial design, photography. He created Expo 67's Kaleidoscope Pavilion, and from that time on, moved totally into film
72 minutes, black and white, 16mm

Breathing Together: Revolution of the Electric Family

"Breathing Together is a document still a little ahead of its time: as a portrait, it is timely and timeless."
Ann Arbor Film Festival 1971, 1st prize

Breathing Together, Revolution of the Electric Family is a film of rhetoric and media, the interpenetrations of medias and realities as one mode of communication dissolves into the next. As its base, it grows from the Great Chicago Conspiracy Trial, which was the coming of age of the counter-culture in America. It is a film of social, cultural exploration, as the essential values of our lives are provocatively de-mythologized in a world that moves simultaneously into a new sense of family

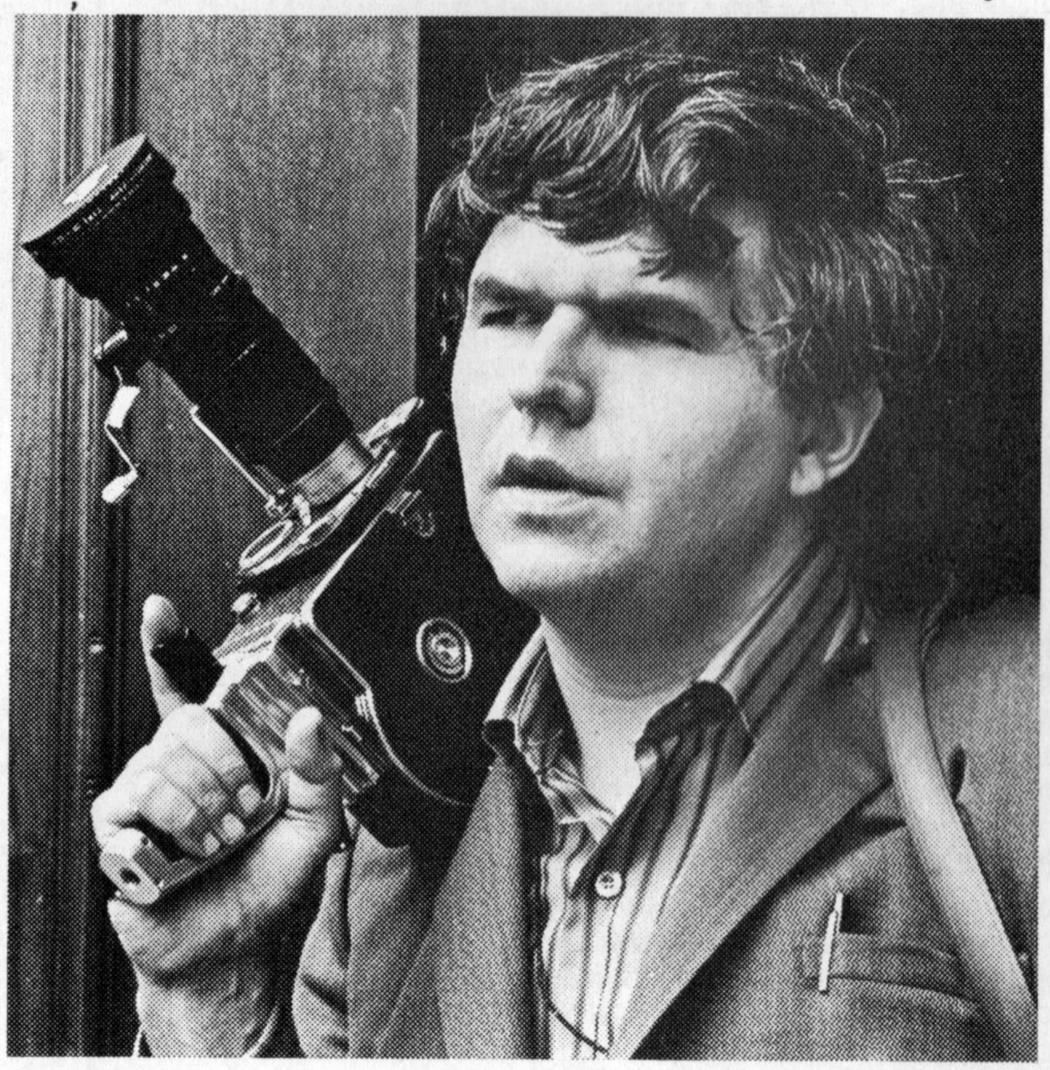
with:

Allen Ginsberg	John Sinclair
R. Buckminster Fuller	William Kunstler
Abbie Hoffman	Claes Oldenberg
Jerry Rubin	John Lennon
Fred Hampton	Timothy Leary

84 minutes, black and white, 16mm

ALLAN KING ASSOCIATES
CANADA LIMITED
11 Hazelton Avenue, Toronto 5
962-2845

TRANSCRIPTION OF SOME REMARKS BY



STAN BRAKHAGE
DELIVERED ON FEBRUARY 12TH, 1970 AT THE SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE ON THE OCCASION OF A SHOWING OF PARTS 3 AND 4 OF HIS FILM "SCENES FROM UNDER CHILDHOOD."

TAPE RECORDED BY BLACK SHADOW

BRAKHAGE: Do you have any trouble hearing me? Is it OK? 'Cause I'd rather not have a microphone if I can get away without it. I guess at least some of you have seen sections 1 and 2 of **Scenes From Under Childhood.** What's showing tonight is sections 3 and 4—the second half of all that's been completed so far on that work. I would like to just say a few words about it, and then look at it. Afterwards, I'll be glad to entertain any questions anyone might have.

Essentially, I started this film four to five years ago. I abandoned it at certain points for a few months' time and worked on other things, but for the last two years I've been working on this film almost constantly. Its total length so far is about two and a half hours, and we'll see the latter half of that tonight. As near as I can judge by my working processes and the amount of footage that I have already shot, even if I didn't photograph anything more on this project there would be material there for close to eight hours, which would constitute the complete **Scenes From Under Childhood.**

I think of it as a first chapter. It already seems to me that I have

arc/mt 2021

something in the nature of a second chapter that would be called **The Stars Are Beautiful.** It's autobiographical. Considering it as a whole book, then, with an indeterminate number of chapters, I consider this to be something I could really work on for the rest of my life. It would be very autobiographical in one sense but some other things besides. Autobiographical in a Proustian sense, rather than in the usual sense of autobiographical.

Proust is very appropriate here, because the work is very involved with the memory process. The first, simple, daily impulse to make it was to see my children—to see them as something much more than mine, much freer than that possessive word "mine" would imply, to share with each and every one of them (and I have five) various parts of their life more directly than I felt I was being able to. Photographing them was one way (I'm most intensive and excited when I'm doing that) to begin a relationship of better seeing, or entering their world. But I felt that I had to do something much more than that, which was to remember *my* childhood, to relate in *that* way.

I immediately was mistrusting my own memory process, and rightfully so. I could prove that the mistrust was justified, inasmuch as my memories tended to give me the sense that the childhood realm is a more innocent, more pure, more happy state than . . . and so on. And I could *see* that that wasn't so, that in fact the various hells and heavens and purgatories of each of my children's struggling with what was confronting them—the emotions they felt —were certainly no less intensive than mine. The agonies they suffered over trying to master the tying of shoelaces, for instance, were certainly no happier a state for them than any economic or terrible complexity that would seem to be thwarting me.

So I really had to push into that sense, to the point of remembering so I could defeat the "editor" in the head (an editor who is determined to make sure certain spans of life have a happy ending, others not, that one period of life is a tragedy and that another is a comedy, and so on) and get into a more "daily living" sense of working with thought processes . . . and of *living.* So an attempt just to understand the children became involved in memory process, and through that, becoming specific about what it is that a person —say, that I do most of each day, and how I do it.

So the film evolves into being very involved in particularities of daily living. The kitchen table, and the bathroom, and the sunlight moving across certain plants in one way at one time of year and a different way in another, and so forth. Slight movements—movements that would be regarded as boring were it not for the intensity of the need to see them as adventuresome, as being really the major center of any living. Just how one rests one's elbow on the table and shifts it slightly, and changes that, and what that has to do with the way someone across the table then does that. The screwing of a lid on a jar, but not in any euphoria or play.

That's the other mistake: when people start concentrating on daily living they tend to start sentimentalizing that in the way of saying either that it's a dreadful bore and a catastrophe (which is, I take it, Beckett's too-easy-for-me solution) or that it's lovely and wonderful (which would be Shirley Temple's sentimentality). I think Shirley Temple as an image of a child did more damage to consciousness in children—I mean she did more damage to the world in that role than she would if she became President of the United States. (Which we might have yet to face, I don't know.) But the damage was—the extent to which *she* was used, and to which all children are used to stand for certain cutenesses. Their interest in anything daily is in fact a cuteness, or a play, or just a game.

Well, I don't know if that's what's in the film finally anyway, but those were some of the things that were involved in the intensity of struggling to make it.

The film is silent. I had started by putting a sound track on the first section of this work. I felt it was a good combination of sound and image, but when I got back to the second part of the film I had to have a print made first, because it was so complex that to even *think* of adding sound, or a sound relationship, I needed to look at it. And when I looked at it, I felt I couldn't *possibly* add sound to it. It would destroy its real, initial being. So then I was very worried about the first section, which seemed to me terribly weak. One night I tried turning off the sound for the first time, and looked at it silent. And then it suddenly had the strength that the second section had, it was equal to it as a visual experience.

That, after years of struggling with sound and image and combining them, settled it for me. I sold my sound equipment within two weeks, and don't intend to work with that again, ever. That's not to say I'm against sound and visual imagery—just that for myself, in what I'm trying to work with and evolve, sound never is worth the drain that it puts upon the possibility to simply *see.*

I think that's all that needs to be said. Thank you.

THE FILM IS SHOWN

Q. Is this an optical print?

A. This is a very complicated and extremely expensive print. Well, it's an inexpensive print from an extremely expensive master. As a matter of fact, it's pushing lab technology way beyond what the machines were designed to do. The machine that was used is the most advanced machine—as it happened my lab had tooled over and gotten the most advanced machines that are available for this kind of printing. That machine is a computerized printing machine, and it was designed to make what was considered a large number of light changes in the space of 45 minutes.

On the average, in a 45-minute film, no matter how many rolls are involved, they expect 50 light changes: this machine was designed to do several hundred. In the last 45-minute section of my film there are over 4,000. I had no idea when I started working into this that it couldn't be done—I was just putting 4,000 presstabs in there with instructions on them. The only way to get the machine to work was to attach it to the air conditioning system to keep it from blowing out.

Even so, it's very expensive. It takes over a hundred hours for a woman to punch the tape to go into the machine. So, in fact, I could not have made this film at all were I not under a Rockefeller grant. And I am so much faced with that at the moment, because the Rockefeller grant was running for three years, and we were spending always about a hundred dollars a month more than we were getting. We were getting $400 a month, and spending over $500 a month at the lab. Toward the last it got to be closer to $600 a month.

Then the grant ended. There *had* been some hope for renewal, but apparently something in the tax reform bill (which I don't understand) ended all hope of a renewal. As I was told in correspondence with them, it makes it very difficult for foundations to give grants to individuals at all, anymore. I don't understand the details of that, but I *do* understand the implications. In fact, after all these years' work and what I've done, I'm faced very simply now with this film, which I've shot all the footage on to make it continue and grow, that—if I don't get a patron now, finally, that will handle that lab bill, this film is now destroyed. It'll be an incompleted work, because within a few months it will begin to be impossible for me to go back to it.

I'm sort of fed up with the assumption that—people are always telling me that I've "made it". "Isn't it wonderful that a film artist can 'make it' in this society." In fact, I not only haven't made it, but for the first time I'm faced with having an incredible dedication toward finishing this film (and those of you who do appreciate this work can see what is involved in all levels of living and making it) and being faced with the impossibility of continuing it without some individual help.

I've blown the whistle, and put out all the signals, and so far . . . nothing.

Q. It seems that there's quite a lot of unavoidable [sic] repetition in the film. I don't know if *you* found it so, but—

A. I'm sorry, no, I really—

Q. —a good deal of it just put me to sleep, and—

A. —I can't deal with your—

Q. —over and over again. Is this part of the last technique, or is it part of—

A. I'm sorry, but that's—I can't deal with that, I really can't.

Q. With regard to the light flashing, are you satisfied with that? Is that what you intended?

A. Yes. This is most exactly the way I intended it, because it was the most that I had the money to buy. But anyone who works with film or knows anything about it knows that when a filmmaker says "close to intention," he's speaking of a world that the still photographer would find utterly repulsive. The difficulty of getting the color tones to come through just as you want them . . .

There are things not intended. In that section where you just have those changing colors, right in the center of the dish-washing scene, you have just the changing blanks of color—there's a great gouge which occurred on the master. I'm sort of stuck with that. I

2021

could take the master and cut that out, but I've chosen to leave the original intention intact and just live with that, the way we have to live with all scratches. Many tones did not come through.

There's very bright colors. You have these ephemeral pastel colors of the towels, and then a very bright, heavy blank of color. I did intend that kind of contrast there, the thoughtful blank of color and the source in life, and these two do begin moving toward each other. The color is really better than I've ever been able to have before.

Another thing is that I had given up editing in the conventional sense of the word. My drive throughout here was to take whole sections of shooting and lay them in in relation to, and fortified by, superimposition of other material—either supportive in color or texture, or other whole series of shots that went with them—rather than to take the shooting as the material, and start breaking it up and all that extreme mentality or intellectuality of editing. Which, for a film like this, I tend to get more and more suspicious of.

Getting suspicious of memory processes led me to a great suspicion of taking too much for granted—how can I put this in a balanced way?—that (as Eisenstein gave us) the art of film is in the editing. I think he certainly made one there, and there's a great power there, but I have been too dependent on just that kind of creativity which tends to be very intellectual, like the term implies: editor. An editor is very censorial, a censor who moves in there and tries to tidy things up.

I mean, there's a tremendous number of splices in this, and a lot of combining of rolls (which is editing, in a way), but I was out to keep some of the impulse of the original shooting from being destroyed.

Q. When the thing comes back from the lab, is there much element of surprise when you look at it?

A. It's a surprise, That's very difficult, because there are two things happening here. One is that there is a danger in knowing too much what you're going to see. I don't want—I couldn't possibly conceive of working with this material, either photographing it or combining it, with some sense of knowing everything. If I did it would be a very stupid work, because on that level I'm a very stupid man. It's to set up the circumstances. I think of it more in terms of energy. I'm after seeing and recognizing, on the film itself, its aliveness and how each element sustains that aliveness throughout.

Of course I have a lot of knowledge, from experience, of what two pieces of film will look like. I don't have that kind of equipment that can combine them before they're *finally* combined, so I have to guess and rely on my experience of knowing that this and that will go together. But it gets too large. I may know at a moment that I'm there with three strips of film, that they will go together. Then I pass on to the next moment, the next foot of film. But when it all comes back it's a tremendous surprise, it's an overwhelming surprise.

And it continues to surprise me. In fact, I would consider it a total failure if it didn't continue for years to amaze me and surprise me. I see all kinds of things I never dreamed were there, which process I credit to forces unknown to me. I suppose the favorite 20th-century word for this is "subconscious", while the 19th-century would have said "inspiration", and earlier they would have said, "the gods". I take it that I'm responsible for helping it to come into being, a kind of mothering process in a way. That's why I feel like such a she-bear now that they tell me my two-and-a-half-hour baby is that much out, and dead.

Q. [Something about acting]

A. Like every other direction in film that's too related to another art, it tends to begin to be apparent to us that it has limitations. I hope I live long enough to see us exhaust whatever film might get from the other arts, and move on. I don't think *anybody* in film has done it yet. Each person has another art that they are "mining" at the moment. For me the primary other area is music, at the moment. I started with drama, like everybody else, and passed through a period of poetry which terminated in **Dog Star Man** and **The Art of Vision.** They were very informed with metaphor and certain poetic devices.

Of late I've just been tremendously mining music for everything that might happen. Of course all filming passes through painting and still photography as sources; many filmmakers begin in one or another of these arts. For myself, I began in poetry and theater.

Q. With **Dog Star Man,** there were a couple of times when you showed all the A, B, and C rolls, or whatever, separately. Do you think you'll do that with this film?

A. No, that wouldn't work at all with this work. The reason I did that with **Dog Star Man** was because in the making of the film I had the desire that each roll would hold up on its own, as well as in combination. Taking every one of those rolls, I ran it through the editor and looked at it by itself, that it should hold up. In this case, I haven't done that at all and they would not hold up. It might be interesting to study it, but there's no intention that way.

Q. How do you evolve your final product? Is it a linear process?

A. It's working by instinct, more or less. My sources are very much more Proust, say, than anything scientific. The case of understanding memory is a matter where art sensibilities are far ahead of any science, and maybe by the nature of the question always will be. The only scientist who's been of any help to me at all in this respect is Sigmund Freud, and the greatest help he gives is in a footnote. He suggests a process of combination and decay, in the memory process, and that footnote is in "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life" which is about the first book he wrote. And he never did follow through on that, unless it's in later, unpublished writings of his.

For instance, I've been very involved for years in the matter of closed-eye-vision, and throughout this work you see much use of paint and of materials suspended in oil, superimpositions, that have to do with the—an attempt to express something of this world that's so alive to children: of closing the eyes and seeing explosions and dots and so on. There's a beautiful book that comes from this city, by Margaret Kellogg, a book of children's drawings. Although she doesn't say so, I felt immediately the sense that she must realize that these drawings they were doing at the very early stage had a lot to do with closed-eye-vision. Particularly finger painting.

The strangest world I think we have available to any sense is the world that occurs when the eyes are closed. And this whole work could be considered as moving in that direction—not just where I'm using dots and specks and patterns, but in fact in the memory process we're talking about. We're talking about how the mind's eye reconstructs the past in memory, and how it might do so fully. It's not that one is after a perfect picture here, like science would be, it's that because it *is* an art it can take on the question fully—just as fully as the person making it can see it or experience it.

To get at that full world, to get the slightest intimation of how scenes are recalled, and how they are dyed or toned by the mind's eye. A scene in which one was angry *does* have various degrees of red or reddish tone in it. And they aren't just red, because there are many, many reds, an infinite number of reds, and there are certain specific shades of red that are involved. When they shift into rust it means something quite opposite than anger. It's this particular type of red which. . . .

Q. Does your idea of closed-eye-vision relate also to the dream state, or is it just in the waking state?

A. Well, the dream state is so very hard to deal with. I don't think anyone's pushed that much beyond what the Surrealists gave us. And latter-day Surrealism tends to be very retroactive and academic—the only person who's ever talked with me and written anything about this is Kelly. He called it the *Dream Work*. Poet Robert Kelly.

Q. Do you see a connection between your idea of closed-eye-vision and myth?

A. Well, it's inconceivable that a human being will invent a creature that he hasn't seen or perceived. So we call this level of invention "a composite". The simplest level of it is a child takes a duck's wings and puts them on a turtle and has made a creature in his mind's eye. When you close your eyes and you see a shape moving, a blob, and it's possible to affect that shape with thought —some of them, not all of them—once you do, that's immediately a process of imagination. That tends to be myth to the extent to which it becomes a satisfactory composite.

So children are making myths all the time, which take a basic shape in the mind's eye. They let it evoke things like it they've seen, and then attach wings to it or whatever. That's how Pegasus is born—it satisfied.

Q. How do psychedelics fit into all this? I mean, if they do at all.

A. That's such a difficult word for me to deal with. Because I'm *tired* of dealing with it. Most of what is advertised under the term "psychedelics" seems to me very cheap these days, as anything to be taken seriously in the art world. There I go sticking my foot in

arcmt 2021

my mouth again. I've got a terrible reputation from lecture tours that says I'm against LSD or drug-taking or psychedelics or whatever, and obviously I can't be against drug-taking. That word, as applied to a movement, has never been of any use to me. It's just been a lot of agony. And has passed into my house, through the mails, a lot of cheap visions, people sending me all kinds of pretty colors, that were cop-outs as far as I was concerned. As a force that relates to the drug scene...my work was all made under alcohol and nicotine.

And I never was against anything, other than that I *did* get a little huffy now and again during certain periods—I've always resented, whether the person was selling religion or God or Art even, anything like that, that kind of advertising that Timothy Leary put out. I don't like it whether it's selling the latest washing machine soap or God Through Drugs. I just think that's such a personal matter. I also don't like their telling us how we're definitely going to get cancer if we go on smoking. I would like to have that information stated so it's available, but I don't like it advertised as an absolute necessity. Does that take care of the word "psychedelic"?

Q. You could say that your work strives toward some kind of ecstacy which in a sense might apply in a general way to psychedelics.

A. Well, that may be a harder word than...I mean, Hedy Lamar?

Q. I mean ecstacy in the sense of Blake.

A. Well, Blake's difficult, he's been giving me a lot of trouble these days. Here we go: Blake. I'm having this particular, personal problem with Blake at the moment. After years of this great admiration, and following and reading an awful lot of Blake, I tend to see a drift—I'm trying to sort out how much of it is really in him or how much of it is in how people are using him these days. There's a drift toward the making of systems which are frankly esoteric. They're an attempt to be *aesthetic*. They're so obscure, or utterly created, and so complex that they refer only to themselves—I'm talking about the later poems now. I'm suspicious of the drive to make such a system in the first place.

It's like he was trying to have his cake and eat it too—to step outside of western literature and at the same time to keep it esthetic by making a complete system that would refer only to itself. So all literature becomes Blake at that point. I'm suspicious of that drive because I'm very tempted by it too. Just as he didn't get along with the London crowd, and I don't get along with the New York crowd these days. And I have this *great* drive, particularly under the bathos and the great wash of the shaky-camera school of filmmaking that's flowing over the nation, I want to excerpt everything I value from that. But I so much hope that I'll resist it, and maybe by pounding on the Blake in my imagination I'll succeed.

But for instance, I think there's a great misappropriation, for sure, of Blake's direction. And then I'm very suspicious of the way people use phrases like "rather strangle a naked babe in the cradle than suffer an unacted on desire." I don't know how many people who were simply neglecting their children have used this as their banner. There was something very beautiful that he meant at the center of that, but I'm very suspicious of the form it finally takes. I'm suspicious to begin with because Blake did not have children. I don't think there's a parent that's been honest that hasn't felt like strangling their naked baby at one time or another.

The same people who quote that it's better to strangle the naked babe will also misappropriate certain beautiful Zen Buddhist teachings to excuse their irresponsibility. Without any thought to the matter that it's so very hard for us to understand the total system of *extreme* responsibility within which those stories occur. So there's a whole drift there that bothers me.

Q. How about "ecstacy" in the more-open sense that, maybe, Whitman uses?

A. Whitman bothers me. We have a man who—I ask anybody here, take the first *Leaves of Grass* and the last one and compare the two. I'm as suspicious of it as D. H. Lawrence was. He said, "No! I am *not* a greasy little eskimo in his kayak, and I am certainly not Walt Whitman. I will not have so simple a sense that I, as a person, can appropriate all these various peoples by these so-simple words, and make one world again."

But I don't mean that to come on any heavier than that I'm telling you where I'm at in my reading at the moment, regarding these two men, and certain words like "ecstacy" and "psychedelics". These are difficult terms for me, and I'm a little cranky about them. Thank you very much.

(Note: This interview was compiled from notes made during a telephone conversation held by Sondra Lowell with Brakhage some time ago.)

In the first place, most commercial films that show nudity really are just a different form of striptease. They aren't essentially different than before, they just show more. And they aren't really showing more. As they are showing breasts, they are concealing the face more. The emphasis in love scenes used to be on the face, on the feelings expressed by the face. It's a matter of culture. A Japanese striptease might show more and more of the back of the neck. The *amount* of the body shown is all the same—until everything can be visible. It's what's stylish at the moment. The rest will be concealed.

Now I think **I Am Curious (Yellow)** is more serious than the typical Hollywood or Hollywood-type European film. But it's not a work of art because the lovemaking relates to a larger social context, such as the scenes on non-violent resistance: it's not simply lovemaking. I don't think a work of art can afford a bias other than personal experience. A bias imbalances the work. If there's one thing we've come to expect of something we call a work of art, it's that everything should be in balance. You can't have an anti-war or a pro-war work of art because it's biased.

(There are also sexual biases that prevent people from making works of art on sex right now. This will show you how much of a problem there is: Out of 40 hours of film I've made in the last 20 years, a couple of hours deal with sex. These couple of hours have given me a reputation for making films about sex, when really only one-twentieth of my output deals with sex. I think that's a good balance. I'm not primarily interested in sex. I want to deal with everything that exists in my life, on film).

You understand it is very difficult to make a work of art in the first place. Whatever experience I have had makes a totality and if I can draw on that totality I stand a chance of making a work of art. We have thousands of years of what is called art behind us—on all subject matter—and one thing that is absent from that body is social bias. Very few works of art have been created during times of social change. In the case where a person's life is involved in an idea and he makes a film about it, he is drawing from his own experience, yes—but then he doesn't need the idea.

I have nothing against Hollywood movies. I go to them all the time. But I personally wish for a great deal more than that. In making a Hollywood movie, the director is biased by his *idea* of what others' experiences are. A Western, whether dealing with sex or whatever, starts with the idea of what is a Western. The director's personal experience simply creates little shifts. The director must be very involved with what's in style, with feeling a part of his society—or feeling out of it because of, say, long hair.

I think the idea of communication is completely distorted in our time. Of course works of art communicate, but not in the journalistic sense. It's a different kind of communication than in escapist movies. It requires a great deal of attention—as a poem requires a great deal of attention. I don't think works of art are more important than other films. Works of art just last longer.

Sondra Lowell is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer and critic.

arcmt 2021

GROUCHO MARX

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS AN OLD MAN

About a year ago, we decided to start a magazine. It was (and is) called *Flash*. And to properly inaugurate the first issue, we thought we'd do an interview with Groucho Marx.

So we obtained his phone number (it's not difficult if you know how) and we called him. He said no. We insisted, gently.

"Will you buy me an expensive lunch?"

"Sure," we said.

"Will you bring a naked girl with you?"

"If that's what it takes," we said.

"Never mind," he sighed. "Just take me out to lunch."

A week later, that's exactly what we did. During the interview Groucho delivered himself of certain opinions about the current state of government in the United States. "This whole gang in Washington, at least half of them are thieves," he said, and later: "I think the only hope this country has is Nixon's assassination."

We printed the interview in the pilot issue of *Flash*, which we distributed to various influential and/or friendly people in the hope of attracting interest and investment. Somehow, a copy found its way across the Atlantic to Richard Neville, who operates an underground newspaper in London called *Ink*. Neville lifted our interview and ran it in *Ink*. He edited the text in an exceedingly heavy-handed fashion, ruined the photographs, and pulled Groucho's remark about assassinating Nixon out of context to run as a banner headline. Thanks, Richard.

***The Berkeley Barb*, a west coast underground newspaper of no discernible value, picked up the *Ink* version of the interview and ran it, thereby giving the false impression that the authors worked for *The Barb*. Thanks, *Barb*.**

Enter The Law. An assistant attorney general with too much time on his hands read *The Barb* and told a reporter for the *San Francisco Examiner* that he was "looking into" the possibility of prosecuting Groucho for threatening the life of the President.

Groucho, reached by the *Examiner* reporter, introduced his own brand of anarchy into the proceedings. He denied everything. "I didn't say that," he told the reporter. "I never tell the truth. It's too dangerous."

Thankfully, that's as far as it went. Two weeks later a small item appeared in *The New York Times* saying that the attorney general had decided not to instigate action against Groucho Marx. (If the Feds were scared, we don't blame them.) In a way, it's a shame—Groucho on the witness stand would have made a wonderful addition to the canon of Marx Brothers movies.

We are sorry that Groucho had to be annoyed by all this, but we are sorrier yet that his remark was so widely circulated *out of context*. Consequently, we are delighted to be able to present the original interview, in its entirety, to a general audience.

RA, JC and MG

We have put on our straightest clothes, smoothed down our hair, and we look almost respectable as we walk into the foyer of *The Bistro* in fashionable Beverly Hills. The maitre D', as suave and cunning as a pair of black leather pumps, quickly approaches.

"Yes?"

"We're meeting Mr. Marx here at one," says Carroll.

"Mr. Marx?" asks the maitre D'.

"Groucho Marx," says Carroll. The maitre D's stare becomes only slightly less icy.

"Groucho Marx," says the maitre D', as if only dimly recalling the name.

"Groucho," says Goodwin.

"Marx," says Altman.

"Groucho Marx," says Carroll, summing up.

"Do you have a reservation?" Silence

"No, but we . . . " essays Carroll.

" . . . thought that Mr. Marx . . ." adds Goodwin.

" . . . had made one," says Altman.

"We thought that Mr. Marx had made one," says Goodwin. It's his turn to gather the pieces. The maitre D' makes a show of peering into the restaurant.

"Well, I hope it's a slow day," he says. He turns back and executes a mannered double-take. "I'm sorry, it's impossible. Coat and tie are required." Goodwin and Altman both have ties, Goodwin has a coat, and Altman has a vest that might pass. But Carroll is limited to a black cashmere turtleneck.

"Mr. Marx said that he was wearing his turtleneck, and that I could wear *my* turtleneck," says Carroll, visibly on the defensive for the first time.

There is a long silence. Goodwin and Altman stand firm, indicating solidarity. Carroll wonders where he can borrow a tie. The maitre D' purses his lips like an ill-tempered judge pondering on the maximum penalty he can impose under the law. Finally he opts for apartheid.

"Very well. If you'll eat in the upstairs room." Carroll nods. Goodwin nods. Altman nods. The maitre D' looks surprised, but he leads the way — through a noisy, crowded, dimly-lit restaurant, up the stairs and into a large, empty, blissfully quiet room.

"Will a corner table be all right?" asks the maitre D', no longer able to cover his sneer.

"Just fine," says Goodwin.

"Swell," says Carroll.

"Wow," says Altman.

As it happens, no one says, "Wow, this is just fine and swell."

Ten minutes later the maitre D' reappears, with Groucho Marx in tow. Disconcertingly, Groucho is not wearing a turtleneck; he is wearing a suit, a shirt, and an expensive-looking tie. He gives us a cold look as we rise to our feet. Clearly, this is one of those restaurants where sitting upstairs is only marginally better than lunching from a brown paper bag on the sidewalk.

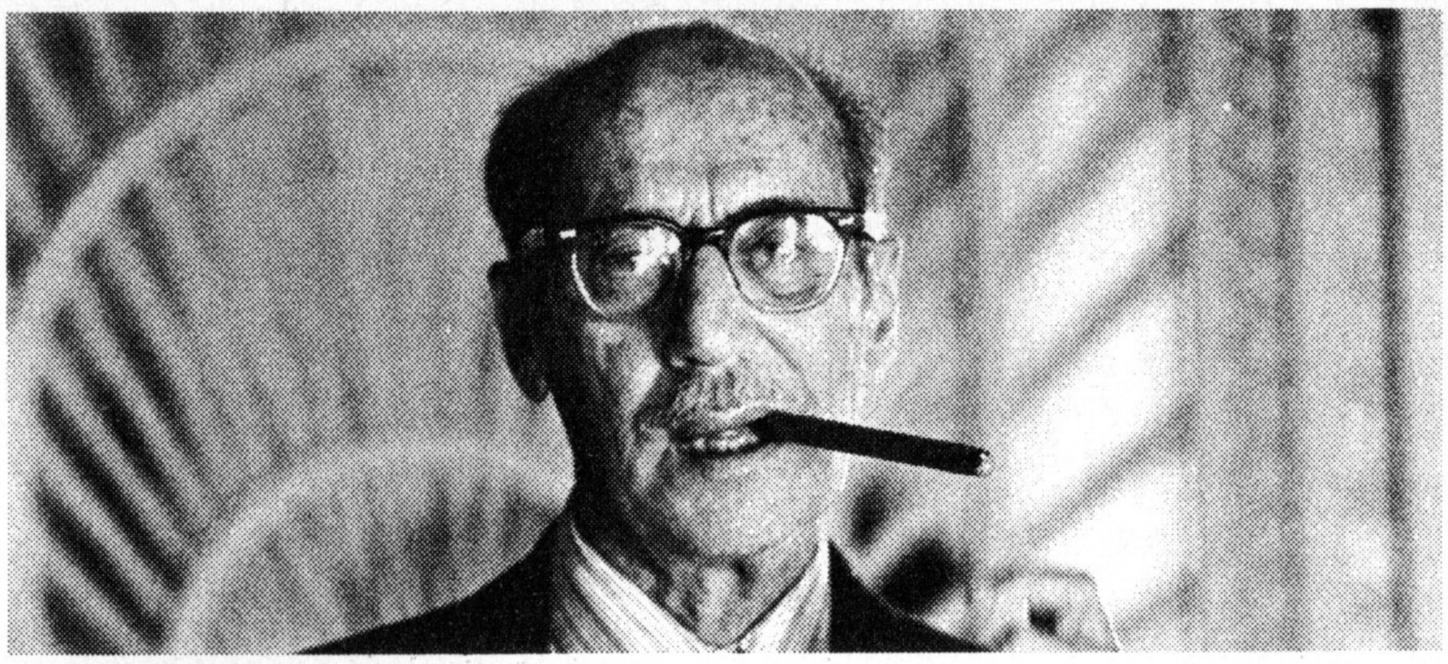
GROUCHO: Do you live down here?

CARROLL: No, we're from San Francisco.

GROUCHO: Frisco, eh? . . . Calling it "Frisco" used to infuriate the natives who came down here. When I was doing the quiz show I would always, deliberately, say, "Well you're from Frisco, eh?" I

Robert Altman, Jon Carroll & Michael Goodwin

2021



PHOTOS BY ROBERT ALTMAN

don't know why they should object to that—I think it's more euphonious, and racier, and more interesting than "San Francisco."
CARROLL: San Francisco people tend to be very defensive, because we're the junior partner—
GROUCHO: Not "junior." "Inferior" is the word.
CARROLL: Inferior partners in the state.
GROUCHO: *(to the waiter, who has arrived with bread)* Do you have any pumpernickel?
WAITER: Yes, sir.
GROUCHO: Not toasted.
WAITER: Yes, sir.
GROUCHO: Just fresh pumpernickel.
WAITER: Yes, pumpernickel.
GROUCHO: Oh, you don't know me, do you? *(the waiter pours the water)* There ought to be a law that they're not allowed to waste water. They did, in some towns. Like New York. Because a lot of people don't *want* water. Especially if they have a bladder problem.
CARROLL: A lot of people don't want New York water. New York water doesn't taste—
GROUCHO: A lot of people don't want New York. I was born on 78th Street, between Lexington and Third. My grandfather was born in Germany. He lived to be 101. He had a very good system for it—he decided to quit working when he was 50, and he never worked again after that.
CARROLL: What did he do?
GROUCHO: In Germany, he and my grandmother had a wagon show. She was the harpist. That's how Harpo learned to play the harp, when she died. It was only a little harp—they didn't make big ones like they do now. Harpo was always fascinated by it. Two days after she was buried he was practicing the harp in the closet. This was in New York, on 93rd Street. We lived there for about 12 years.
CARROLL: Were you on the road a lot during that time?
GROUCHO: I spent most of my early years on the road. I started when I was 14. I sang at Coney Island on a beer keg, and got a dollar. That's the first money I ever made.
CARROLL: Why did you stop singing?
GROUCHO: I didn't. I sang later at the Protestant church on Madison Avenue, in the choir, until they found out what I was. That's an old vaudeville joke, but it *was* true. I did sing—I got a dollar every Sunday. I had no idea what I was singing. And I had less interest in it. That's about as far as I ever got in religion.
CARROLL: Anybody ever try and make you a cantor?
GROUCHO: Eddie did, yes. We weren't religious. My mother and father, neither of them were. I was bar mitzvahed. I didn't know what they were doing to me. My grandfather had bought a speech for $5, and as each boy got to the age of 13 he memorized this speech. So it cost my grandfather about a dollar apiece for each bar mitzvah.
GOODWIN: Didn't he have to pay the rabbi something?
GROUCHO: I suppose. I don't know. I wasn't involved in the details. I was just an innocent Jewish boy and didn't know anything. And still don't.
CARROLL: When you went on the road did you get less innocent?
GROUCHO: In those days I was as innocent as the average young girl today of 14. Sex was frowned on. We didn't know anything about sex, and we didn't *learn* anything about it. My father came from France, my mother came from Germany, and my father was a very stupid, inept tailor. My mother was bright—a shrewd brightness, like Noel Coward's mother had. At any rate, I didn't know where babies came from until I was about 18. And by that time my folks had had five boys.
GOODWIN: How did you find out?
GROUCHO: I don't really know. It was never a subject that was discussed in the house. Or any place else. Oh, there were dirty jokes. We lived near Central Park, and we had heard of fellows taking girls in the bushes. But I didn't know what they were doing, so help me. The first time was when I was playing in Montreal, in some dump theater there. A hooker picked me up, and I didn't know what that *was*, even. She took me down in the celler. There was an iron grating, and we crawled through there and we got to the cellar. Eight days later I had gonorrhea. And I still have it. They say it's something you really never get cured of. The vestiges of that always remain in some part of your body. I think that's true. I think it's a very dangerous sickness, and it's increasing now because of the pills, and the diaphragms, and the various devices that the kids use now. They don't seem to care whether they get pregnant, or get gonorrhea or syphilis.
GOODWIN: Sometimes they don't know enough to—
GROUCHO: But they're supposed to be so free, and to know so much about . . . about sex.
GOODWIN: Well, they don't know as much as they think they do.
GROUCHO: I didn't know *anything* about it.
CARROLL: I think adolescents are probably more or less the same, no matter where they are, no matter what the trappings on top of the adolescence are.
GROUCHO: *(drinking his bloody mary)* Pardon me, this'll tear your insides out. *(to Goodwin:)* Did *you* order that?
GOODWIN: Yes, I did. I'm drinking it slowly.
GROUCHO: I would drink it very cautiously. Fate works in mysterious ways its wonders to perform. I was standing on the corner, waiting for the light to change, and a rather attractive girl came up to me and says, "You're Groucho Marx." I says, "Yes." She says, "I would like you to have one of these magazines." I says, "I subscribe to this," which I do. But I took it anyhow, we got to talking, and finally made a date.
CARROLL: Was she selling them on the street?
GROUCHO: No, she was selling *herself* on the street. No she wasn't, she's the Art Editor of the magazine, and a very nice girl. Around 35, 38—about right for me. I warned her that if she was interested in sex, don't waste her time or mine, because I'm through with that. Oh, I can look at 'em, I like to take 'em out, but I'm not interested . . . the subject matter bores me. It seems like a lot of work for what you get out of it, or what you get into it.
CARROLL: When did it start getting boring?
GROUCHO: Today?
CARROLL: No, I mean when in your life did it start getting boring? I'm assuming that there was a point in your life when it wasn't boring.
GROUCHO: My last marriage, I was 57 years old. I had ten wonderful years with her, but by then the magic had worn off, and we got divorced. I've been single ever since, and propose to stay that way for the rest of my life. It would be folly, at my age, to start getting married again. I've paid a lot of money in three alimonies. It's not worth it. The cheapest way is to have legalized whorehouses, so if a fellow is young, and wants to get laid, his folks should give him $20,

arcmt 2021

or $50, or whatever it costs to get laid. And not get married, just to lay a girl. This is the reason there are so many young girls today who have three- or four-year-old children, were married when they were 16 or 17, and are now divorced. There are not many men who want to take on a girl with a child, especially if they've raised three as I have. I didn't come here to do a monologue—somebody *else* say something.

CARROLL: Um . . .

GOODWIN: Uh . . . I was going to ask you—

GROUCHO: It's about time. Would you pass me the pumpernickel? Since nobody is polite enough to do that. Typical newspapermen.

GOODWIN: Probably not a week goes by when at least one or two of your movies aren't shown somewhere. In the Bay Area . . .

GROUCHO: This is true.

GOODWIN: And I just wanted to know if you get any money from these showings.

GROUCHO: Yes, we get some money from some of the pictures. We own a piece of some of them. Fortunately, the good ones.

GOODWIN: Which ones are those?

GROUCHO: Night at the Opera, Day at the Races, Go West, Room Service. And I did the quiz show for 14 years. That's a long time.

GOODWIN: We all grew up with it.

GROUCHO: I might do it again.

GOODWIN: Really?

GROUCHO: Yeah, I'm getting bored by not working.

ALTMAN: How do you spend most of your time now?

GROUCHO: Boring other people. Like you.

CARROLL: Oh, no. You mustn't think we're bored.

GROUCHO: I read a lot.

CARROLL: Before the movies, when you were on Broadway, what was it like?

GROUCHO: Vaudeville. First we were in vaudeville, small-time vaudeville, where there were rats in the dressing rooms. Frequently, it was the manager.

CARROLL: What lured you away from Broadway and out to Hollywood?

GROUCHO: Paramount offered us more money than we could afford to reject. We went there and we did five pictures

GOODWIN: Did you have a fair amount of control over those pictures, or did you have a director telling you what to do?

GROUCHO: There were directors on them. We had a few good directors—Norman McCloud was a good director. Leo McCarey was a very great director. We had some terrible directors.

CARROLL: Like who?

GROUCHO: It's a long list of mediocrity—I can't remember at the moment.

ALTMAN: Which film was your favorite?

GROUCHO: Duck Soup, Night at the Opera and **Day at the Races.** Some of them were terrible. To us, not to the audience. The kids, today . . . I get more fan mail now than I did when I was at the height of my career.

GOODWIN: Why do you think kids love your movies so much? A lot of other old films, nobody wants to look at anymore.

GROUCHO: They're not *about* anything, most of them. I thought ours were generally about something.

GOODWIN: What were they about?

GROUCHO: They were attacking the contemporary establishment of those days. We did a picture called **Duck Soup** which was about monarchy. We did a funny picture about a school, and we certainly satirized the opera in America. So I think our pictures were about something, whereas in most cases—Harold Lloyd, Keaton and those fellows—they weren't about anything, they were just trying to be funny. We were trying to be funny, but we didn't know that we were satirizing the current conditions. It came as a great surprise to us.

ALTMAN: How do you feel about the establishment now?

GROUCHO: I think it's hopeless. This whole gang in Washington, at least half of them are thieves—I don't think there's any question about that. Every day you read about it. Look at the tolerance that Johnson gave to Bobby Baker, who's now in jail. This goes on all the time. The only honest senator I ever knew was a fellow named Williams, from Delaware.

CARROLL: John Bell Williams.

GROUCHO: I had a lot of correspondence with him.

CARROLL: How did you and Mr. Williams get started?

GROUCHO: I just wrote him and told him how much I admired his integrity, and that there should be more people like him. He finally quit. Not from the correspondence—I think he had had it. But he was an honest man. Look at the Speaker of the House, McCormack . . . he stole everything before he left. And they gave him a bonus besides, because he didn't steal enough.

CARROLL: Some incredible pension, $50,000 a year for an office and a secretary.

GROUCHO: He was just an illiterate old Irishman who didn't know anything.

ALTMAN: Do you think there's any hope for Nixon?

GROUCHO: No. I think the only hope this country has is Nixon's assassination.

GOODWIN: But then we've got to deal with Agnew.

GROUCHO: Well, I mean it would be near the end of the term. Agnew won't run again, I don't think. But I think Muskie is a good man. The trouble is when you run for important office, you have to promise so much, and you have to obligate yourself so much. To everybody. In Illinois, in Chicago, in Maine, North Carolina, no matter where you are—if you just move in without any friends, you just can't get elected. You have to obligate yourself in some way to get to that office. I think the other guy, McGovern, is a joke. The mere fact that he's against the war is not enough. He says he's been against the war for three years. So what? I've been against the war since the first war with the Kaiser, but that doesn't qualify me in any way to run for the Presidency.

WAITER: Do you want me to bring you a little menu up here?

GROUCHO: As bad as the food is, I think we ought to eat something.

WAITER: OK, I'll bring the menu.

CARROLL: How involved were you in the writing of the pictures?

GROUCHO: I've always been a writer. I wrote five books. One is in the Congressional Library in Washington: "The Groucho Letters."

GOODWIN: Do you think there'll ever be a second volume of that?

GROUCHO: I don't know. The cast I had in those days was pretty good: T. S. Eliot, Thurber, Fred Allen. I spoke at Eliot's funeral, you know. His wife asked me to. A very dull, blonde, middle-aged woman.

CARROLL: That seems to be true of a lot of very talented men—their wives seem to fade into the background.

GROUCHO: Because, as a rule, a young fellow marries a girl to go to bed with her. This is the normal procedure. I did that three times, with very beautiful girls. When the beauty started fading, there wasn't any reason to stay married. The sex stimulant was gone.

ALTMAN: What about companionship?

GROUCHO: For that you need a different kind of girl—you don't necessarily need a girl with big tits. You need a girl that normally you wouldn't marry, or you wouldn't try to lay. But if a fellow gets both, he's a very fortunate man. If he gets a woman that he enjoys sitting with and talking to, and she understands what he's saying, he's a lucky fellow. You see, I don't believe there's such a thing as love. I believe two people can like each other, and I think that's much more important than love. Love just means going to bed and fucking. You can get that anywhere, if you're young and partially attractive.

ALTMAN: Did you ever fall in love, in your youth?

GROUCHO: I always thought I did, yeah. So I paid three alimonies. And I look at those women and I wonder, "What did I see in them?"

CARROLL: Are you still friendly with them?

GROUCHO: Yes, I took my ex out last night for dinner. I like her, but I don't want to go to bed with her. The charm of that is gone. She would like to go to bed with me, but I have no interest in her that way. As you get older, your interest in laying a dame disappears. I've three or four girls that I take out now. They're all young, but bright.

CARROLL: Do they understand what you're saying?

GROUCHO: They do, but I don't.

GOODWIN: If I had a nickel for every time I've done the "Party of the first part, party of the second part" routine, I'd be a rich man today.

GROUCHO: But I wouldn't be around you. Yeah, that's a good scene, a good satirical scene about a contract.

GOODWIN: You destroy language in the process of it. The language starts out meaning something, but by the end of the scene it's gibberish, it descends into total anarchy.

GROUCHO: Yes. As I remember, I was standing on someone's body, just with one foot like it was a barroom, while I was doing that scene with Chico.

GOODWIN: I was curious how you see the films now, in retrospect.

GROUCHO: A scene that I like is the scene in **Animal Crackers** where a painting had been stolen, and Chico and I pulled up a couple of chairs and said, "Let's see if we can figure this thing out, where the painting is." He said, "How are you gonna do that? We have no house." I said, "We'll build a house. This'll be your room

arcmt 2021

here, and this'll be my room, and this'll be the maid's room." And he said, "You mean I'd have to go through the maid's room in order to get to your room?" It was kind of a Lewis Carroll scene. We had a fellow named Morrie Ryskind who had a Lewis Carroll quality about him. He could take lunacy and build it up.

(The waiter arrives with a large menu, hand lettered on a large square of cardboard, which he props up next to the table.)

GROUCHO: *(to the waiter)* How long did it take you to paint that?
WAITER: A little lentil soup today? Soup of the day?
GROUCHO: Maybe a little fish . . . .
WAITER: Lentil soup. No mercury.
GROUCHO: That's *your* story. How do you know there's no mercury?
WAITER: We got that new thing, that thermometer thing.
CARROLL: What do you do, stick it in the fish and it tells you how much mercury there is?
WAITER: No . . . .
GROUCHO: They lie, they just lie about it, they're good at it. If you don't believe so, look at those prices. This menu is as permanent as the pyramids. *(peering at it across the table:)* You know, unless you can see well it's advisable not to come in here at all. I can't see a goddamn thing.
WAITER: We've got all kinds of hamburgers.
GROUCHO: At least you've got the courage to call it what it really is.
WAITER: No, it's great, it really is. Done with sautéed onions, served with french fried potatoes and a broiled tomato. It's very, very good.
GROUCHO: I know a fellow who always eats pancakes stuffed with crabmeat.
WAITER: That's the madras, that's very good also.
GROUCHO: Nunnally Johnson.
WAITER: Oh, yeah. He was here two days ago.
GROUCHO: He was, huh? The sonofabitch, he never even asked me.
CARROLL: Well, if it's good enough for Nunnally Johnson it's good enough for me.
ALTMAN: I'll have the avocado and crab.
GROUCHO: *(to Goodwin)* What are you having?
GOODWIN: I think I'll have a hamburger.
GROUCHO: It's not hamburger, it's a Salisbury steak.
GOODWIN: OK, in that case I'll have the Salisbury steak.
GROUCHO: They charge you an extra dollar for that. Well, it's up to me, huh? Has the business fallen off in the last six months?
WAITER: Not at all.
GROUCHO: Of course you're lying.
WAITER: No, no, seriously. Sometimes I wonder why myself.
GROUCHO: I'm going to have the steak tartar. It's the most expensive thing I see on there.
WAITER: Would you like everything in it? Anchovy?
GROUCHO: Well, put *something* in it. And I'd like some salad.
WAITER: *(leaving)* OK, thank you.
GROUCHO: You *will* be back?
CARROLL: Didn't S. J. Perelman write for you?
GROUCHO: Not a great deal. There's a strange thing about that man. When he was riding high on the *New Yorker*, and anybody asked him if he'd worked with the Marx Brothers, he'd say, "A little bit, not very much." Now that he isn't so successful anymore, and his name isn't front page, when he gives an interview he says, "Oh yes, I wrote pretty near all of two of their movies." Which is a goddamned lie. As a matter of fact, he worked in conjunction with four other writers, and he wasn't very good for us.
GOODWIN: Why not?
GROUCHO: He wasn't a dramatist. He could write funny dialogue, but that's very different from writing drama. For that we needed a different kind of writer, like Kaufman and Ryskind, who won the Pulitzer Prize for *Of Thee I Sing*.
CARROLL: Did you write most of **Animal Crackers**?
GROUCHO: No, we had Kaufman and Ryskind. I added stuff to it, but every first-class comedian is supposed to be able to do that. Otherwise you're just a schlump, you're not a comedian.
GOODWIN: Well, you didn't have anyone writing your material on the quiz show, did you?
GROUCHO: Oh no, that was just ad lib.
GOODWIN: Yeah, and that stuff was as funny as anything in the films.
GROUCHO: Well, that's easy for me.
GOODWIN: Did you have any favorite types of people for the quiz show?
GROUCHO: I didn't care. I never met them before I encountered them on the stage, 'cause that inhibited me. The first three weeks I met them before the show and talked to them. And I said, "I don't want to do this any more—I want them to come out as a surprise. If it's funny, fine. If it isn't, we'll take it out."
CARROLL: Did you devise that . . . uh . . . duck?
GROUCHO: No. You'd be surprised how many people come up to me in the street and say, "Hey, what'd you do with the duck? And what's the secret word?" And it was a long time ago. That's why I'm tempted to go back and do it again, because there seems to be a lot of eagerness to see this again. The quiz show ran 14 years.
CARROLL: Even in re-runs, I used to see—
GROUCHO: *(to Carroll)* Are you a girl?
CARROLL: Am I a girl?
GROUCHO: Yeah, a girl.
CARROLL: No, I'm not a girl.
GROUCHO: I thought it was about time we settled that.
CARROLL: Are you talking about my hair?
GROUCHO: No, it was the moustache. Will you pass the pumpernickel, please?
GOODWIN: I get the impression that you don't approve of long hair and beards.
GROUCHO: I'm indifferent to it, I don't really care. If a young man wants to wear a beard and a moustache . . . Why do *you* wear it? Is it a revolt against the establishment?
GOODWIN: Well . . . no, I just like the way it looks. And it's less trouble to shave in the morning.
GROUCHO: Do you think the average girl prefers a man with a beard?
GOODWIN: The girls that *I* know do.
GROUCHO: Are they *all* degenerates?
ALTMAN: In your day, Harpo had longer hair—
GROUCHO: No, he wore a wig.
ALTMAN: But still, that was the appearance he gave to the public.
GROUCHO: But he had no beard, no moustache.
GOODWIN: You have a moustache. You have a *famous* moustache.
GROUCHO: Yeah, I *had*.
CARROLL: When did you stop painting it on and start growing it? And why?
GROUCHO: During various periods of my life I got bored with it, and I'd shave it off, paint one on . . . How many books of mine have you read?
CARROLL: Two. "The Groucho Letters" and "Groucho and Me."
GROUCHO: Well, "Groucho and Me" is really autobiographical.
CARROLL: Yeah, well I'm asking a lot of questions that I kind of already know the answers to because they might be interesting for the interview. There are also a lot of Marx Brothers stories that I'm unsure are true or not. For instance, the thing about . . . whose office was that? I think it was at MGM, where he kept you waiting, and you went into his office and—
GROUCHO: Thalberg . . .
CARROLL: And took off all your clothes? And built a fire?
GROUCHO: We were young then.
CARROLL: For the same reason that you did that, perhaps, that's why we're wearing beards. One of the reasons, anyway.
GROUCHO: Insurrection?
GOODWIN: On a psychological level.
CARROLL: Yeah, right. It's kind of a way of saying to people who care about that kind of thing that we care about it too—that we don't happen to believe the particular line of bullshit that they're handing us.
GROUCHO: Funny, how the styles change.
CARROLL: I've always been curious about what you said to T. S. Eliot, and what T. S. Eliot said to you, when you had dinner together.
GROUCHO: Well, we spent a long evening talking, I don't remember . . .
CARROLL: About literature? About movies?
GROUCHO: He wanted talk about the movies, and I wanted to talk about his writing. And that's the way the evening went.
GOODWIN: Have you managed to hold onto enough money so you don't have to worry?
GROUCHO: Yeah. As a rule, I don't answer any questions as personal as that.
GOODWIN: Well, I figured if you didn't want to answer it you just wouldn't answer it.
GROUCHO: Suppose I asked you how much money you had?
GOODWIN: In my pocket right now?
GROUCHO: No.
GOODWIN: Well, I'll tell you.
GROUCHO: But I'm not interested.

amzmt 2021

CARROLL: That's why we're interviewing you and you're not interviewing us.
GROUCHO: Well, so far all I've had is two slices of pumpernickel.
GOODWIN: We're doing our best.
CARROLL: Honest to God, they promised us steak tartar.
GROUCHO: You notice what they thought of you—look where they put you.
GOODWIN: It's Carroll's fault, he didn't wear a tie.
GROUCHO: Really? Was that the reason?
CARROLL: Yes, and—
GROUCHO: That's kind of ridiculous today. Why should they care if you're wearing a necktie? I come in here without neckties, wearing a turtleneck, and they never say anything to me.
CARROLL: That's what I said, in fact. I said, "Mr. Marx said he was wearing his turtleneck, isn't it all right for me to wear my turtleneck?" And they said, "If you sit upstairs."
GROUCHO: It's childish.
GOODWIN: I always figure that if a restaurant has dress restrictions, the food isn't as good as it might be.
GROUCHO: The food is good here. And expensive. As your editor will find out when he gets the bill.
GOODWIN: Why can't they make funny movies anymore? What did you have that they don't have?
GROUCHO: Well, to begin with we had talent. Then we had very good writers. And we spent a year on each picture. Elliott Gould has just made four pictures in five months. How can they be any good? Especially since it's just two people in bed fucking. It takes more than that.
GOODWIN: Still, even the films that are supposed to be funny—like **Catch-22**—just don't make you laugh. When I see a Marx Brothers movie I come out with my sides hurting a little bit, and the muscles in my face all tired from laughing.
GROUCHO: You should take a doctor with you.
GOODWIN: It doesn't reach the point of pain, usually.
GROUCHO: But don't you know them so well by this time that there's no more laughs left in them?
GOODWIN: Absolutely false. I must know nearly every shot in them, and I still roar with laughter. The conceptions are so beautiful that the element of surprise becomes less important. The sequence at the end of **Duck Soup,** where with every cut you go through a whole set of costume changes—
GROUCHO: You mean in the war?
GOODWIN: Yeah. I know it's coming every time I see the film, and I still love it every time.
GROUCHO: Half the time I didn't know which side I was fighting on.
CARROLL: That's what was nice about it.
GROUCHO: The kids are very smart. They've caught all these things. That's why I get so goddamn much fan mail. And I'm not crazy about that, because Harpo and Chico are gone, and I'm the only one left who can write. They couldn't write when they were living.
ALTMAN: Why did you stop making movies?
GROUCHO: Lazy. I don't need it, I don't need the money.
GOODWIN: Don't you feel any responsibility to your fans?
GROUCHO: Not at all. If they don't like you, they can forget you in 15 minutes.
GOODWIN: But they haven't forgotten you.
GROUCHO: I know, but I'm enough of an actor to know. I've seen too many actors who were stars, and if you mention their names, people say, "What? Who?" You must have no respect or liking for your audience. It's enough that they amuse *you*. Let 'em do that.
WAITER: One hamburger. *(He presents it)*
GROUCHO: That's all you brought, one hamburger? For three people?
WAITER: That's it. You'll have to share it.
GROUCHO: No wonder the chicanos are in trouble. I always thought that was a town in the mideast.
WAITER: Who gets a nice tartar here?
GOODWIN: Mr. Marx.
GROUCHO: A man of my age with raw meat. Well, I don't eat this often. You know, I have a two o'clock appointment with my doctor. If I get there at 2:15 I'll still be alive.
GOODWIN: Many people who look at your films now see elements of surrealism and dada in them.
GROUCHO: It's kind of an LSD effect I guess.
GOODWIN: That wasn't exactly what I meant. I wondered whether, in 1935, the names Cocteau or Jarry would have meant anything to you?
GROUCHO: At that time, all I was reading was the New York Journal, with editorials by William Randolph Hearst. Why is the pumpernickel always over there?
GOODWIN: Well, why don't we put it over here, where you can reach it?
GROUCHO: 'Cause I'm the only one who's eating it. Anybody want any of this salad?
GOODWIN: So you say you weren't influenced by the classic surrealists, eh?
GROUCHO: I had never heard of them in those days, I was too busy making a living in vaudeville.
CARROLL: Of your whole life in show business, was that your favorite time, when you were in vaudeville?
GROUCHO: I ate in cheap restaurants, lived in bum hotels, boarding houses . . .
CARROLL: And yet there's an atmosphere of half-glamour, half-nostalgia for vaudeville.
GROUCHO: Au contraire. I was crazy about earning money and living well.
GOODWIN: Always?
GROUCHO: As soon as I found out it was better than being poor.
GOODWIN: Then you weren't at all interested in art?
GROUCHO: Not at all. Not in the pictures nor on the stage. I think I was a natural comedian, and I enjoyed doing that.
CARROLL: Did you ever think when you were doing it, even privately, that it was art?
GROUCHO: I thought I had a good racket going. No, I never thought of it as art. I don't think the word art, which happens to be my son's name, has ever come up in my thoughts or my conversations. I didn't think there was any art involved. We were trying to be funny, and we were getting very good money for it.
CARROLL: Well, now that there's a vast body of literature dedicated to the proposition that the movies were art, have you changed your mind?
GROUCHO: No, I still feel the same way. I think we were very lucky that, with a limited amount of talent, we fooled the public successfully for many years.
GOODWIN: But weren't they worth coming to see?
GROUCHO: *I* didn't think so—I wouldn't go. Oh, I like some of them. I'll never forget: I think the best picture we made was **Night At the Opera.** We previewed it in San Francisco, and in those days they used to give the customers cards on which they would write what they thought of the picture. And one card we got just said, "Youse guys are fulla shit." Now do you expect me to have any respect for that, and call it art?
GOODWIN: Did you think he was right?
GROUCHO: Of course not, I thought it was a great picture. Best picture we ever made.
ALTMAN: Did you have a good time making it?
GROUCHO: Sure, we were fucking the girls on the set and in the dressing rooms—at that time I was in my thirties.
GOODWIN: What do you think of the current state of films these days?
GROUCHO: I liked the Jack Lemmon picture where he was trying to get to New York, and the things that happened to him—**The Out Of Towners.** And I liked **Lovers and Other Strangers** pretty good. I was unimpressed by **Catch-22.** I didn't think that they got that book at all. **M*A*S*H** I found kind of rowdy and funny.
GOODWIN: Did you see **A Hard Day's Night**?
GROUCHO: I saw all the Beatles' pictures, which I thought were bad imitations of the Marx Brothers. I was in London at the time those pictures came out, and I said, "No, these guys haven't got it." I was talking to their director, a guy named Lester, who came from Philadelphia.
GOODWIN: What did Lester have to say to you? That he stole all your stuff?
GROUCHO: I don't remember. I told him I thought it was a poor imitation. There was a composite something about the Marx Brothers pictures that made them so appealing, and what it was I don't know.
GOODWIN: I think it was a combination of irreverance and intelligence. The combination is rare.
GROUCHO: I'm so close to the Marx Brothers pictures that it's hard for me to assay them, or judge them. I'm glad that the kids like them, and that they're so popular now.
GOODWIN: You may have to end up accepting the opinion of the critics, that whether you intended them to be art or not, they came out that way.
GROUCHO: It was just luck. I didn't know that the youngsters were going to take these pictures up, and that we would become kind of movie gods to these kids. I was over at somebody's house the other

archive 2021

night, and there were three girls there. Two of them were 16 and one was 18. And I looked in the other room where they were, and they were playing some Beatles records, and imitating *me* walking up and down in the room! It struck me so strange. And these weren't jerks, these were bright girls.

GOODWIN: There are many occasions when it seems like the only appropriate response to some aspect of the universe is to do a Marx Brothers line, or a Groucho walk or an eyebrow number. It's hard to explain why. Maybe it's the way we participate in—

GROUCHO: I think it was . . . like the kids are wearing beards and smoking stuff that they shouldn't smoke . . . I think our pictures were a protest, although *we* weren't aware of it, of the current situation. Today's establishment. Murder at Kent State, and those kind of things.

GOODWIN: I'm not quite clear on how you could have made pictures that were protests against the establishment without knowing it.

GROUCHO: I was very dumb. I'm not too bright now, either.

GOODWIN: Well, what did you *think* you were doing?

GROUCHO: Making jokes.

GOODWIN: But the jokes had to come from somewhere.

GROUCHO: Oh, I knew my way around a joke. It's like a guy who builds a cement wall, he knows how to do it. I never had any writers, except in the movies. And then I had the best: Kaufman and Ryskind. Matter of fact, I had dinner with Morrie Ryskind the night before last. Brilliant guy. He now does a column on the Hearst paper.

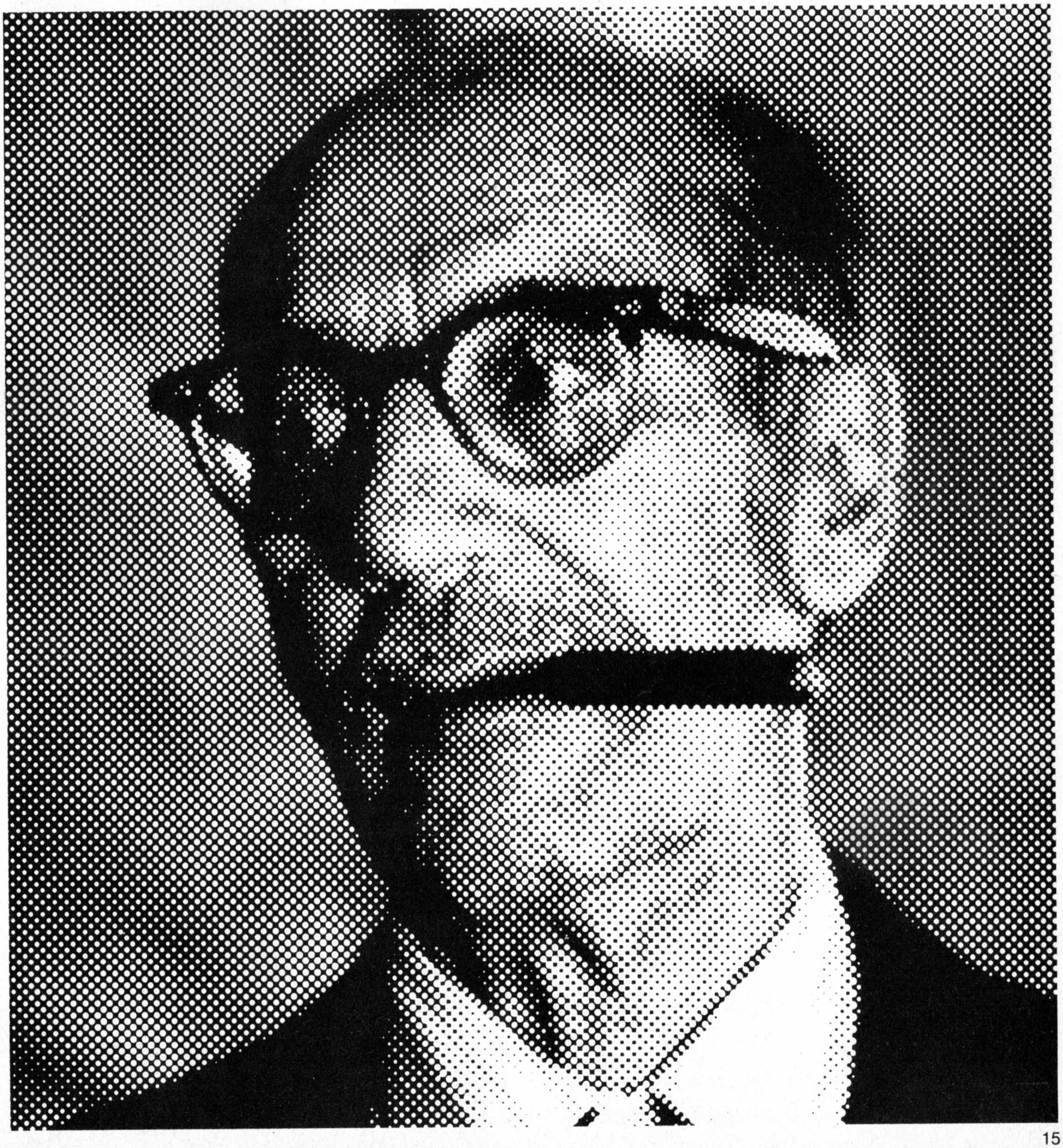
CARROLL: Have you ever written a regular column?

GROUCHO: No. I've had chances to, but I don't want to take that on. I wrote a lot of magazine pieces years ago. I'm lazy. You see, the thing that makes most people work is money.

CARROLL: But now you want to get back into the quiz show, and you don't need money.

GROUCHO: That's fun. I could do that with you right here and now, with no preparation, because I'm good at it.

CARROLL: Is that how they were done? You would just appear at the studio without any preparation and they threw these people at



archive 2021

you and you did what you wanted with them?
GROUCHO: No, I would know what category, perhaps. They would tell me, "You're gonna have a plumber on the show tonight," or maybe a housewife or a civil engineer or something. And you'd have some basic questions, like, "Are you married?" "Are you single?" "Do you believe in marriage." These kind of questions. And from that, I would light off usually into my own. I'm sure . . . well, I'm not comparing myself to Lewis Carroll, but I'm sure that's the way *he* worked.
CARROLL: Oh, I think it's a very fair comparison.
GROUCHO: It's a kind of lunacy.
CARROLL: Yes, you start from what appears to be an extremely rational premise—
GROUCHO: That's true.
GOODWIN: And degenerate into anarchy.
GROUCHO: The contract scene is a really ludicrous scene. It winds up with, "There ain't no Santa Claus."
CARROLL: But it starts out as—
GROUCHO: A logical piece of writing.
CARROLL: Right. Two people talking about a contract.
GOODWIN: How about the scene where you and Harpo are on

opposite sides on an empty mirror frame, and Harpo is pretending to be your reflection?
GROUCHO: That was stolen from a classic German act that Leo McCarey had had in the back of his mind for years.
GOODWIN: It was McCarey's idea?
GROUCHO: Yeah.
CARROLL: I had thought you had been doing that scene for years, and so had developed the timing to the point where it was perfect.
GROUCHO: No, we rehearsed it one Saturday morning and shot it.
GOODWIN: How long did you have to rehearse it?
GROUCHO: Oh, I think we did it for about an hour and a half.
CARROLL: Who did the staging? For instance, the stateroom scene in **Night At the Opera**?
GROUCHO: Sam Wood was the director, but Thalberg was actually the boss. Sam Wood would shoot a scene, we'd look at it the next morning in the projection room, and Thalberg would say, "I don't like it, let's shoot it over again today." He had the kind of money and control that he could say that.
CARROLL: Was he usually right?
GROUCHO: Invariably. I think he was the most outstanding producer this town ever had. They built a whole building and called it the Thalberg Building.
GOODWIN: Whose idea was the stateroom scene?
GROUCHO: As a matter of fact, it was my modesty that was responsible for the scene. We had a scene where a guy was driving me on a truck, on which there was a huge trunk, and I was sitting on top of it singing Pagliacci. So we came to this room, which was just a little larger than this table, and the porter put the trunk in there. But I couldn't get in the room. So one of the authors said, "Take your clothes off." I said, "No, I won't do that." "Why not?" "I've never taken my clothes off on the stage, or in the movies, and I don't intend to do it now." "Well, we have no scene if you don't take your clothes off." I said, "I think we do."

I had a date in the room that night with this big dowager. So we close the door, and I'm in the room with the trunk, and I start singing "Oh For the Open Highway." Then I open the trunk, and in there is Harpo, Chico and Allen Jones. Now there's four of us in the room, and I'm trying to get them out of there because I have a date with this dame with the big tits. But they don't want to go out, they want something to eat—they hadn't eaten anything since they were on the boat. They were stowaways. So I send for the waiter and we have this scene . . .
GOODWIN: Where more and more people pile into the stateroom.
GROUCHO: And Chico kept adding, "And two more eggs," "Three more eggs." He'd ordered about 40 eggs. And more people came in. At one point a plumber came in and shouldered his way through—there were now seven or eight people in this tiny stateroom. He said, "Did you send for a plumber?", and I said, "Come right in, I'm sure there's *something* needs fixing here." And then other people came in, and finally a manicurist came in. Which was my favorite line of the whole scene. She said, "You sent for a manicurist?" and I said, "I certainly did." She said, "Now do you want your nails long or short?" I said, "You better make them short, it's getting pretty crowded in here." People were laughing so much—because of the scene, not from the line—that the audience never heard the line unless it was an empty theater.
GOODWIN: As the scene developed, who were the ideas coming from?
GROUCHO: All of us. Christ, we had been together twenty years. Harpo was trying to fall asleep in this room, and Chico was holding him up. You couldn't write that scene. That scene just had to be done mechanically, that's all.
CARROLL: I have the impression that Margaret Dumont never really understood what was happening.
GROUCHO: This was true. She had no idea what I was talking about, at any time. Frequently she would ask me, "Why are they laughing now?" I tried to explain to her. There was a line when Harpo and Chico were stealing a painting, in **Animal Crackers,** and Margaret Dumont and I came in the room, and it was pitch dark. She said, "My, it's so dark in here you can't see your hand in front of your face." And I said, "Well, you wouldn't get much enjoyment out of *that*." And the audience laughed like hell, and she came to me after the scene and said, "Why did they laugh there? What was funny about that? It *was* dark, and I *couldn't* see my hand."
GOODWIN: Why did you begin using Margaret Dumont?
GROUCHO: We used her in the first Broadway play we did, **The Cocoanuts.**
GOODWIN: What was it about her that made you pick her?
GROUCHO: She was a natural foil. She was tall, statuesque, good looking, looked like she came from high society: she was a perfect foil. I did the last show that she ever did—at the Hollywood Palace about two years ago.
CARROLL: You did a Quackenbush.
GROUCHO: Yeah. Hackenbush, if you don't mind. I have to go, boys. It's twenty after two.

arcmt 2021

Ever thought of using "The African Queen"....

Potemkin or **Rashomon** as a curriculum-oriented glimpse into other times, other cultures? It's not as far-fetched as it sounds. Sure, documentaries and travelogues have their place, but don't always reveal the true essence of, say, the superstition of a mediaeval peasant, the Chekovian grace of nineteenth-century Russia or America in the Thirties as do classics like Bergman's **The Seventh Seal, Lady with a Dog** and Orson Welles' **Citizen Kane.** Films like these show the real-life people in an almost infinite range of social and cultural contexts — living, loving, hating, fighting. Students will remember what they've seen because they can't help but be involved. Why not give it a try? Send for our illustrated and annotated catalogue of top film classics. You may not create a class-full of film buffs, but you'll certainly give your pupils a compelling glimpse into the world around them.

Janus Film Library (Canada) Limited

224 Davenport Road, Toronto 5, Ontario. Tel.: 416-962-5676

arcmt 2021

DUCK SOUP FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

by Joe Adamson

The number of people who give in to the temptation to call **Duck Soup** a political satire is indicative only of the weakness we have for putting into categories things that don't belong there. However, the differences between **Duck Soup** and a real political satire are indicative of a lot of things. For one thing, a satire, political or not, usually sets out to make some sort of a coherent statement. If anybody made an attempt to prove that **Duck Soup** makes a statement, his first major problem would be figuring out what the hell it is.

Duck Soup simply makes international diplomacy out to be a gangrenous gaggle of blunders, madness, egotism, and tomfoolery. This is a point of view that still has its advocates. Ever since 1933, in fact, politicians have dedicated themselves to proving that it's true.

The creators of **Duck Soup** won't call it anything but "a crazy picture." Nat Perrin, one of the writers, reminds us that nobody set out to do a satire. The reason, after all, that Charlie Chaplin made a satire like **The Great Dictator** was to attack Hitler and the world situation that had made him possible; the reason Paramount made **Duck Soup** was to get another Marx Brothers picture done.

Leo McCarey, **Duck Soup**'s director, says only that "It kidded dictators." Another of the writers, Harry Ruby, gets almost indignant when you ask him, and claims, "We wrote shows and movies for only one purpose: Entertainment. That is all there was to it!" Arthur Sheekman, another writer, disavows the mantle of satirist somewhat more reluctantly: "Comedy is best when you upset stuffy people or notions, but that doesn't mean that you start out with social criticism. Comedy almost invariably turns into criticism of some kind, and Marx Brothers comedy is criticism of everybody who is pretentious."

"This whole business of social significance is nonsense," is the personal pooh-pooh of George Seaton, and one of the real studio favorites. Hollywood seems convinced that there is a hard core of intellectuals lurking in the shadows, all set to riddle movies with Freudian symbolism and social significance, and if they're not stopped it'll mean the end of us. Dare to suggest that either of these insidious poisons has anything to do with your liking of a movie, and the whole town is sure to hate you for it.

Nat Perrin, however, tells us, "It is possible that whatever satire is there, kind of crept into it because that was the way the men involved thought." That's more like it. That would contribute quite a lot to a constructive line of thought — presuming that it is within the bounds of human endeavor to ascertain from **Duck Soup** just what the men involved could have been thinking at the time.

Groucho's recent remarks on Vietnam may offer some help. "It would be different if we were fighting a just war, if there is any such thing," he says. "If I were a youngster, I wouldn't march into the firing lines with any bravado. I would go to Canada or Sweden, or hide, or go to jail. If I had a son twenty years old I'd encourage him to evade the war. He has a right to his life." When **Duck Soup** was being shot, Hitler's first aggressive speeches were coming over the radio, and they stopped shooting twice for the purpose of listening and being horrified. George Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, who were involved with the Marx Brothers, if not with **Duck Soup**, made their proclivities clear by writing **Of Thee I Sing** (which really *was* a political satire), and by never letting the Marx Brothers perform it — for the specific reason that it wouldn't have been a political satire by the time they were through with it. Morrie Ryskind, in fact, was expelled from Columbia University six weeks before he would have graduated, because he wrote an anti-war editorial for the *Jester*.

It is a strange line of reasoning that presumes, simply because you did not *intend* to do something, that you did not, in fact, do it. It's always been popular with little kids, but it never caught on in the courts. How pleasant it would be if one could drive onto Los Angeles' complicated freeway system and, by simply not *intending* to go to Santa Monica, not go there. But if you find yourself at the end of the line, staring at the ocean, perhaps you should try figuring out where you are and how to get back to civilization again.

What happened was, the Marx Brothers decided to choose a director. One day they happened on the realization that if their movies were going to get any better, they were going to need somebody who could crack a whip louder than Norman McLeod, who had

directed **Monkey Business** and **Horsefeathers.** The most likely prospect, the Marx Brothers made it known, was the young, gracious and charming Leo McCarey — who politely refused the whole idea.

McCarey's film career had gone from birth to maturity in the few years since he had graduated from U.S.C. Working for Hal Roach for five years, coming up with the idea of teaming Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy and supervising all their early films (and by McCarey's definition "supervising" the films is to be translated as "making" them) was enough to establish him as one of the only creative, individualistic directors there were — and this at the tender age of 34. Word had even gotten as far as the Marx Brothers, and you couldn't impress the Marx Brothers with a branding iron. Unfortunately, word of the Marx Brothers had also gotten as far as McCarey. Norman McLeod probably took him aside and showed him his bruises.

McCarey was the type who was more amused by the subtleties and frailties of human behavior than by hyperbolic parables of man's innate lunacy; light, romantic comedy was more to his liking than hard, clanking buffoons. Two of his most choice achievements as a comedy director — the two-reel Laurel and Hardy silent **Big Business**, and the Cary Grant-Irene Dunne divorce comedy **The Awful Truth** — are delightful comedic studies of heated passions and cool tensions in the steady rise and fall of true human conflict. McLeod's comedic achievements, on the other hand, came from being agreeable to just about anything his comedy stars wanted to do.

McCarey dominated every film he directed, in ways that were spontaneous, graceful, and various. Sometimes he did so much improvising at the rehearsal stage, and even on the sound stage, that the actors were never sure exactly what was happening. Sometimes the constant pantomimes in the course of his conversation were infectious enough to show up on film, performed by his actors. (Many of Stan Laurel's familiar mannerisms, in fact, were originally McCarey's familiar mannerisms. The director had a "Let's go have a beer" gesture, and an "Anybody want to play tennis" gesture that friends and associates haven't shaken yet.) Sometimes he sat around playing the piano or telling stories to the crew until he had an idea for a scene, and then he'd proceed ahead at his own convenience — through lunch or past suppertime — to get it done while his enthusiasm was up. Underlings got used to the idea that things went on only when McCarey felt like it, and gave up trying to question the procedure. When visions of sacrificing this control to look for a missing Chico danced through his head, McCarey let it be known that he had other things to do.

And the next thing you knew, Groucho and Chico were in New York doing a radio show. Groucho and Chico played two lawyers named Beagle and Shyster, and, as Groucho's character claimed both top and bottom billing for himself, the name of the law firm was Beagle, Shyster, and Beagle. The show went over with just about everybody except a real lawyer named Beagle, who claimed that strangers were continually calling him up in the middle of the night to say, "Is this Mr. Beagle? How's your partner, Shyster? Snicker, Snicker! Guffaw, Guffaw! Click!" Reasoning that the best defense was no offense, radio's favorite Beagle changed his name to Flywheel.

The half-hour episodes were written by the alternating teams of Arthur Sheekman and Nat Perrin, and George Oppenheimer and Tom McKnight (the latter of whom was signed up at a urinal). Due to the nature of Marx Brothers comedy, the writing took more time and more punch-lines than writing for any other comedian: the writers labored practically day and night on the enterprise, frantically compiling old jokes, incorporating them into each other, and desperately striving for new ones.

Though it must have seemed like a sound idea, the radio program was too much of a sound idea to work: Standard Oil of New Jersey cancelled the show after 26 weeks, although insidous gripes and grievances in the Middle East were said to have had something to do with it. Other sponsors who dropped Groucho and Chico for reasons of diminishing market or troublesome raw materials included American Oil and Kellogg's Corn Flakes. "If you're hungry some morning," said Groucho, "you might try this combination."

And the next thing you knew, Groucho and Chico were back in Hollywood again.

There is good reason to believe that the only cause McCarey had for even pretending to undertake **Duck Soup** was the steadily accumulating evidence that it was never going to be completed. Besides, he was getting close to the end of his contract, and when the showdown came he just wouldn't bother to renew. He met with the Marxes, with Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby, the writers, and with Herman Mankiewicz, the producer. He found the gang very pleasant and agreeable, just so long as nobody brought up the subject of moviemaking. So, for three weeks, many darts were thrown at dartboards, many contests were held, many wagers were won and lost. The only real bugaboos in this grand setup were Kalmar and Ruby, who had this idea about rival duchies and parliaments and spies, and wanted to hash it over.

"When are you going to learn to mind your own business?" they'd be told. "You'll never get anywhere, Harry. You'll never amount to anything."

This left Kalmar and Ruby to function as a sort of Lewis and Carroll, blazing the trails of this maniac expedition by themselves. Rufus T. Firefly was born. Sylvania. Freedonia. The plans of war. A hostile diplomat named Trentino.

Once the throwing of darts got to be a bore, the Marxes turned their fancy to matters of moment. "Say, we've got a picture to do," they informed the writers one day. "Paramount's putting a lot of money into this, you know. We're going to have to stop fooling around."

Bert and Harry nodded politely.

"All right, now, we're going to have an important meeting, you hear? I know this is asking a lot of you fellas, but we want this picture to be one of our biggest hits, and we'd like to go over each one of the scenes with you. Could you please come in tomorrow morning at 9:30?"

"But we *always* come in at 9:30."

"Well, then, come in at 8:30."

And everybody *did* come in at 8:30. Everybody but the Marx Brothers. When they didn't come in at 9:30, yesterday's quibbling began to look academic. By 11:30, it was downright marginal. And when they *did* show up at a quarter to twelve, what was their attitude? Apologetic petulance? Paternal condescension? Nonsense. It was utter indignation!

"Where were *you*?" they fumed.

"Where were *we*? We were right here."

"How do you like that, they were right here! We go out of our way to have a meeting, and they just sit right here!"

"Well, wait a minute . . . "

"Look, Harry, we're making a picture and spending a lot of money, and when we say 9:30 we mean business."

"Well, wait a minute, Groucho, where were you guys?"

"Why, RKO!"

"RKO?? We're not making this picture for RKO . .!"

"Don't change the subject!"

It didn't take the writers long to see that they were never going to get anywhere without enlisting reinforcements. Grover Jones, one of the most confirmed Hollywood natives in sight, had performed in every department of production from scene painter to technical assistant, and finally became a gag man and director for Vitagraph one-reel comedies. By the time sound came in, he had settled down to scripting Westerns like **Stampede** and **Gun Smoke** and little homey affairs like Paramount's **Tom Sawyer** and **Huckleberry Finn.** The idea of returning to comedy appealed to him, and he got himself assigned to the unit. He was introduced all around, had the rudiments of the story explained to him, and began attending the script conferences. After three weeks he walked out.

Luckily, there was ready replacement in the form of another Paramount contract writer named Kean Thompson. Thompson was a personal friend of Kalmar and Ruby's, a good, solid professional, and a wonderful, agreeable person. "Gee, I'd love to work with you fellas on a Marx Brothers picture," he actually said one day, and after the arrangements were made he began to assume the daily tasks, and attend the meetings. Two weeks later he couldn't be found. (For months thereafter, a skulking zombie who resembled Kean Thompson was intermittently sighted lurking in the hallways of Paramount. "I've never *seen* anything like that!" he'd wail to every sympathetic ear, and then disappear into the shadows.)

Then the comedians took *their* turn. Suddenly **Duck Soup** found itself without any Marx Brothers. It seems they had been dickering for some time with the front office and the William Morris Agency over the profits from **Monkey Business.** The whole thing started when the agency complained they never received their share. The Marxes apparently felt they didn't *deserve* a share. (We'll never know just what it was they said. The agency had it stricken from the record on the grounds that it was "frivolous.") Then, the Marxes sued the *agency*, claiming that the share the William Morris people *did* get on **Cocoanuts** and **Animal Crackers** was too high, because of some underhanded deal they had made with Paramount. Supposedly, the deal violated the Marxes' contract, but they could never prove that, because Paramount kept shifting the contract from one subsidiary to another and it never held still long enough for anyone

archive 2021

to read it. Finally, by March of 1933 the Marx Brothers' steadily mounting annoyance reached a pique. They marched out of Paramount Pictures and into the warm, loving arms of old Sam Harris, through whom they formed Marx Bros. Inc. By April they were in New York merrily issuing stock. By May they were taking on the whole Paramount mountain in a lawsuit.

McCarey, sensing that the conflict had grown so steeped in the acrid that a reconciliation was hopeless, renewed his contract after all. Therefore, at approximately that very moment, and to McCarey's horror, the Marxes settled every single tiny problem and returned to the studio.

Now that the fighting was over, it was time for the fighting to resume. McCarey knew what he was in for, and he knew what he was in up to. Sheekman and Perrin (from the radio show, remember?) came home from New York. They were now writing Goldwyn musicals, and had become a pretty reputable team. McCarey set them to work on Kalmar and Ruby's first draft, not only dropping more gags into the stew, but, now that McCarey was really going to direct the film, getting a little of McCarey into the screenplay by playing up the big-business-like passions and tensions of true human conflict in the Groucho-Trentino squabble. A few of the bigger giggles from the expired radio show found convenient niches in the storyline, among them a line about shadowing a man all day ("What day was that?" "Shadowday!"), and another about a riddle in the middle of a courtroom ("What has a trunk but no key, weighs 2000 pounds, and lives in the circus?") whose admonition ("That's irrelevant!") turns out to be the answer. Sheekman found the old Plow Routine (the bit where you are about to ask somebody a favor, and then envision the fellow refusing you and get so indignant about his refusal that when you finally see him you smack him in the face before he gets a chance to say anything) a convenient way to rile up Groucho over nothing in particular and get the war scene started.

There was even employed, for one incredibly brief period, another gag man in the form of Eddie Kaufman, a very pompous and nice little man who smoked big cigars and collected letters and signatures. Kaufman babbled continually through writing sessions, on the assumption that if his voice was heard he was contributing somehow. He later became a producer at RKO. Strangely, Kaufman never got around to walking out. He hardly even had a chance to walk in.

Soon they had reached the point where everybody was running around making up gags about no matter what, and squeezing them into the picture. The assemblage jammed together in great hordes and small claques, trying all their jokes out on each other again, but by this time they were all of them hardened veterans—meaning that none of them laughed. As Groucho remembers it, the only sure way to test a gag was to try it out on Zeppo. If he liked it, they threw it out.

Groucho tried enlisting the aid of a seasoned non-professional one day. On the way to the studio, he asked a service station attendant what he thought of his new joke about a man who stuffed spaghetti with bicarbonate of soda, thus causing and curing indigestion at the same time. He got a slightly pained expression and a full tank. It was only months later, after the movie was finished and previewed that the attendant explained how funny he thought the gag was, but that he hadn't been able to summon up a grin that particular morning because a toothache was bothering him. So much for *that* audience. (The gag later popped up in a completely unlikely context in **Night at the Opera**.)

By the middle of July a final script was finished, and by the time rehearsals were over it was half gone. McCarey shared the view-point that a script for the Marx Brothers was about as definite as a treaty for the Indians. Like most of their directors, he preferred Harpo to the verbal comedy that proliferated endlessly and made a nuisance of itself, and as usual, nearly every bit of business written for Harpo was replaced with something better by the time it was filmed. McCarey gave Harpo some prankish consistency by giving him a pair of scissors with which to snip off the end of everything in sight. McCarey went around engendering enthusiasm for the picture by telling everybody one of the lines from the battle scene, "They fought this whole war with laughing gas!" and falling to the floor in a fit. (Much as it seems to have amused McCarey, it never excited an audience and it left the movie after the first preview.)

McCarey's eagle-eyed mind seized on a small script reference to Chico as a peanut vendor. He sought out Edgar Kennedy to play a lemonade vendor, brought Harpo in as Chico's partner, and for a couple of days the four of them improvised and shot, Hal-Roach-fashion, some dandy comedy routines.

The Marxes soon found that they weren't so charmed as they had expected to be by McCarey's constant attempts to really *direct* their movie. They knew he was a talented man, but they hadn't quite expected him to insist on the fact. The insertion of familiar silent comedy bits, for instance, was taken as an affront to their sensibility. "That idea of snapping your fingers went out with the Keystone Cops," Groucho muttered. Harpo was malleably receptive to just about anything McCarey wanted to do, but none of them was sure just where it was going to get them.

Then, in a fit of *auteur*, McCarey threw out one of the major scenes of the film—a sequence taking place in a theater, which included not only a tango scramble after Freedonia's plans of war (resembling the football signals complications in **Horsefeathers**), but an expansive production number involving the dictatorial ambitions of Groucho ("Of course you're all aware/A King must have an heir/Someone to pass the family name along/Will someone tell me where/I'll ever get an heir/If a King can do no wrong!"), and a couple of gags that would have seen their day as classics had they been allowed to live ("You haven't been still a moment since you've been here. You act as if you had neurosis." "I no gotta new-rosis. My un-

2021

cle he's got a flower shop—he's-gotta new-rosis."; "If his Excellency doesn't get here soon, he'll miss the whole performance." "He's-a not missing anything. He's back stage with the girls." "Back stage with the girls? What could he be doing there?" "Well, he *could* be playing solitaire, but I don't *think* so."). It was replaced, instead, by an improvisational field day involving Harpo and Chico stealing the plans of war from Margaret Dumont's safe, and reviving the old mirror routine. Nobody was sure what to make of that. Including the writers. Harry Ruby walked onto the soundstage one vacant afternoon and found Groucho and Harpo recognizing each other as mirror images of themselves. He began to get the impression that his own haphazard script had been heltered and skeltered all over the halls. This, naturally, is the way everyone *thinks* comedies must be made. But Ruby knew better.

"What scene is that?" asked Ruby innocently.

"This is the scene where they break into Mrs. Teasdale's house." Harpo explained to him.

"Oh, *that* scene!" said Ruby. "I'm afraid to ask what they are breaking into Mrs. Teasdale's house *for*."

"What's the matter, Harry, don't you like it?" they asked.

"Oh, it's fine. It's great," said Harry, and walked away. If there's anything like a drop in a bucket, it's a dissent in a maelstrom.

McCarey's self-indulgent habit of working when he felt like it was frustrated by certain self-indulgent habits on the part of his stars—among them their recurrent practice of popping up whenever the mood of the moment impelled them to, and otherwise wandering off to wherever fate led them, as well as turning rehearsals and shooting days into unwarrented gag sessions. All this was complicated by a clause in their contract which insisted that, no matter what, no shooting was to be begun after six in the afternoon. "Read my contract" became the standard defense when McCarey would try to start things up again too close to sunset. Such intrusions on his prerogative were not intended to cement new friendships, and McCarey was on the verge of gathering up whole armies to march into battle against them, when it occurred to him that the simplest way to chastize his antagonists was to pull the same trick on them.

So one day he got all four of them together, started working a scene over until it got good and late, excused himself to make a phone call, and went home to his wife and dog. An assistant stood around and made excuses for him, while the Marx Brothers were anxiously watching the hour approach six, and dreaming of short fuses and the Fourth of July. Their combustion point was approaching when the assistant decided that he had to make a phone call too. He ducked behind a corner and giggled and chortled for a moment or two. By the time he got back, Chico's facial muscles were fairly twitching in anticipation. "Gee, I'm sorry to keep you waiting, fellas, but I had to talk to Leo on the phone," the assistant let them know. "He's home in bed, and he wanted me to tell you he's recovering nicely, and has every expectation of being here bright and early tomorrow morning to direct this scene for you."

What a wet match that turned out to be! They couldn't walk out in anger. They couldn't get angry at anybody. They couldn't even come back with "Read my contract." All they could come back with was "Hell!" and things like that. Leo McCarey was the only man on earth who could teach the Marx Brothers a lesson and come out of it with his life. But you'll notice he planned the gag so he'd be miles away when the punchline came.

Margaret Dumont was popularly demanded back into the game. Groucho admitted that dropping her was one of his less inspired inspirations, but one feels his heart must have been warmed by some of the other exclusions: the harp and piano solos, any hint of a love interest (Kalmar and Ruby created a romance between Zeppo and Raquel Torres, but McCarey went ahead without it), and even the mundane melodic ditty, "Keep On Doin' What You're Doin'," which Kalmar and Ruby later put in to a Wheeler and Woolsey picture.

There are some exclusions that are regrettable. Probably for Hays Office reasons, they dropped the sight gag wherein Harpo, displaying a tattoo of an outhouse on his chest, is slapped on the back by Groucho, causing the door of the outhouse to swing open, and a little hand to reach out and shut it again. The replacement (a live dog barking out of a doghouse) isn't quite so ingenious. Also un-used was Groucho's habit of taking a rabbit from his hat every time he exits or enters a room. Or the opening exchange in the battle scene: "Your Excellency, the enemy is approaching! They are only a stone's throw from here!" "So that's their game! Very well, we'll throw stones too. Go out and get me an armful of stones." Or Groucho's answer to the problem of some evidence of treachery: "I know how to solve this mystery: I'll get a small glass slipper and go from house to house and when I find the girl whose foot fits the slipper I'll go in the house and you'll never see *me* again."

There were so many gags flying around that they could afford to lose a few in the shuffle. In fact, when the gags flew, they flew in all directions:

"What's my character in this picture?" asked Harpo one day.

"What's your *what*?" asked Mankiewicz. When things got too serious, he was uncomfortable.

"My character." Harpo was being plagued by pleas from Alexander Woollcott, who was going around calling him the greatest pantomimic artist, since Chaplin, to perform in the Soviet Union, and his head was turned in a neat 240 degree arc. "I can't play this part unless I know what my character is."

"Aw, hell," said Mankiewicz, "you play a middle-aged Jew who goes around picking up spit."

It was Bert Kalmar who wondered, "Well, do you think they'll like it?" during a screening of the rushes.

Chico was definite. "Like it? Look, they'll piss!"

"No doubt about that," said Groucho. "But will they *laugh*?"

A female lead was hard to find, and selection was still in progress when Chico volunteered, "I don't like that one."

"Why not?" he was asked.

"Oh, she's old and has big tits."

"I resent that!" huffed Mankiewicz. "My mother is old and has big tits."

The title was no easy matter, either. **Duck Soup** is actually the name of one of McCarey's Laurel and Hardy pictures, but that's no justification. Groucho, who claims he can understand every one of their titles but **I'll Say She Is**, explained it all with the following recipe: "Take two turkeys, one goose, four cabbages, but no duck, and mix them together. After one taste, you'll duck soup the rest of your life."

Shortly after the film opened, it was revealed that there really was a Freedonia and it was a city in New York. Its Mayor felt obligated to address a letter to Paramount saying, "The name of Freedonia has been without a blot since 1817. I feel it is my duty as Mayor to question you intentions in using the name of our city in your picture." Groucho felt it was his duty to write back. "Your Excellency: Our advice is that you change the name of your town. It is hurting our picture. Anyhow, what makes you think you're Mayor of Freedonia? Do you wear a black moustache, play a harp, speak with an Italian accent, or chase girls like Harpo? We are certain you do not. Therefore, we must be Mayor of Freedonia, not you. The old gray Mayor ain't what he used to be."

Duck Soup features the one and only musical performance on record of all four Marx Brothers together (a ridiculous mock-whoopie that includes lines like, "You got guns, we got guns, all God's chillun got guns," and manages to lampoon at one time Hollywood musicals, patriotic hoopla, glorified violence, team-spiritualism and football rallies), which is beautifully choreographed for the camera and is yet another example of directorial prerogative, as there is no trace of it in the final script.

Duck Soup is centered around an admirably compact and workable story—considerably more complex than **Monkey Business** and less of a plot-pourri than **Horsefeathers**. The story is told not in images, not in words, not in music, but in gags—enough of them so the plot doesn't have to be handed over to some rancid Romeo to sweat out agonizing scenes that neither we nor he are much interested in, in order to "hold the picture together". **Duck Soup** holds *itself* together.

Duck Soup is characterized by Kalmar and Ruby's fanciful absurdity, that deals with motivation and storyline on its own terms or not at all. It features some of the most playful performances on record, not only from the Marx Brothers but from all the supporting players; everyone seems to be not only comfortable in his part, but downright cozy. It also features Harpo's love of animals bordering on sodomy. (He wanted to attack an old ladies' home in **Animal Crackers**; he was hitting the hay with a heifer in **Monkey Business**; and now, in **Duck Soup**, he finally makes it to bed with a horse). It features the devil-may-care cutting of Leo McCarey, who seems to have been more interested in spontaneity than in continuity: when two good shots don't match, McCarey's answer is to put them together anyway and let them fight it out.)

Duck Soup juggles logic and defies gravity, it is outrageous, it is ridiculous, it is funny, it is savage, it is silly. It is a symphony in gagtime, composed by an army and orchestrated by one man. McCarey fought back and won. He had even been gracious and charming enough not to turn it into a Leo McCarey film.

There are political satires and there are political satires. As it turned out, **Duck Soup** is neither.

arcmt 2021

an interview with Claude Chabrol

Claude Chabrol was born in Paris in 1930. He studied pharmacy but gave up that profession to become involved in cinema. In the 1950's he wrote for *Cahiers du Cinéma* along with Truffaut and Godard, and in 1957 he co-authored a book on Hitchcock with Eric Rohmer. He was once in charge of publicity for 20th Century-Fox in Paris. When he quit, his job went to Jean-Luc Godard.

Ten years ago, Chabrol was one of the leading exponents of the "New Wave." His first feature film, **Le Beau Serge,** made in 1958, won for him the Best Director Award at Locarno, and his second, **Les Cousins,** won the Golden Bear at Berlin in 1959. A year later he made **Les Bonnes Femmes,** one of his most personal films and one of the great films of the sixties.

By the mid-sixties, Chabrol's career had waned and he was reduced to doing commissioned projects. Two years ago he returned to critical favour in dazzling style with **Les Biches** and **La Femme Infidèle.** He is now considered to be a film-maker of major importance; notorious for his sense of humour, his bizarre characters and his recurrent themes.

Chabrol's more recent films, **This Man Must Die** and **Le Boucher,** deal with murder as does **The Night Visitor,** which he is currently shooting. **La Rupture,** a film he made this year, is still unreleased.

. . .

Murder certainly seems to be your most favorite theme.

It's not so much a favorite theme as it is a means to an end. Murder is very commercial, everybody enjoys it. It's the best way I know to bring the audience into the theatre. Murder always arouses a great deal of interest.

Would you say that relationships interest you more than plots?

Definitely. The plot is just for the audience. I don't like the plot too much you see—what I like is what people are at the beginning of a scene and what they are at the end of a scene. I'm primarily interested in their relationships, and the plot is just a means to get at the behaviour of the characters.

Is this why, for instance, you reveal the identity of the murderer so early in ***Le Boucher****?*

Of course, I am not interested in solving puzzles. I am interested in studying the behaviour of people involved in murder. If you don't know who the murderer is, that would seem to indicate that he is not interesting enough to be known and studied.

What of the symbolism in your films, how much of this is actually intended by you?

Perhaps people find symbols that I haven't put into a film, but likely as not I have put them there. In fact, there's very little chance that I haven't. I find symbols in everything myself. It's a big game with me to find symbols to use in my films.

What qualities would you say the protagonists of your films have in common?

I think that most of them are feeble or weak. It's when they are weak that I like them the best. When they are too strong I'm not so sure.

How do you think of yourself?

I think I'm very strong myself. I'm a piece of stone, a rock.

Why this interest in the weak then?

I think because I am strong, I understand them better.

Would you say that you have a pessimistic attitude towards people?

Not towards people in general, only towards the way they live.

How do you come to choose certain colours for your films? Do you work out an overall color scheme beforehand?

Yes. I make a chart on paper, a progression of scenes set out as a scenario, and I mark the dominant color opposite each scene. Once I've marked the dominant colours on the board or chart, I then spend lots of time bothering the technicians to make sure that they get the colours right.

I was very conscious of the colour yellow in ***Le Boucher.***

Each time I make a film I try to choose a colour for each person. Not necessarily the colour they wear, but a colour that corresponds with them. Colour has a very different effect on people according to the person involved.

You are generally considered to be the more Hitchcockian of your contemporaries. How do you feel about this?

As soon as you deal with the problem of murder and particularly blood, it is very hard not to come into the context of a man who spent forty years making films about this very subject.

As far as I'm concerned I find myself much less influenced by Hitchcock than I used to be. Now, as far as the conceiving and shooting of a film, I find myself much closer not to Hitchcock, but to Fritz Lang.

Can you elaborate on this?

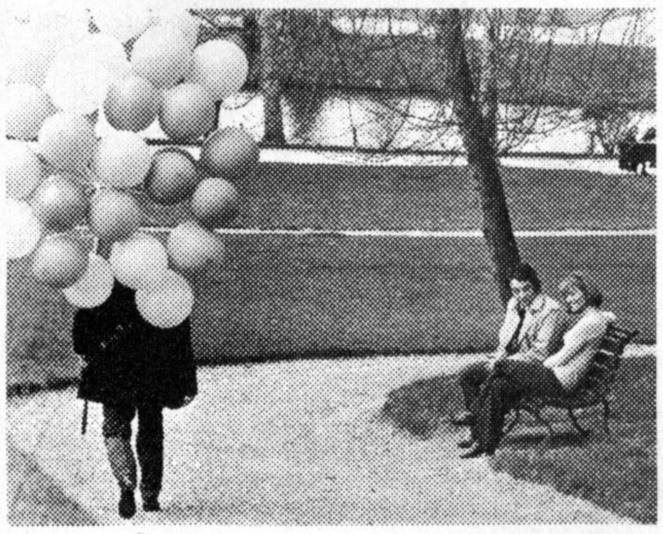
arcmt 2021

1 *Chabrol*
2 *Le Boucher*
3 *This Man Must Die*
4, 5, 6 *La Rupture*

1

2

3



4

5

6

Where Hitchcock uses ten shots in a film, I try to use three. Hitchcock's shooting is dynamic and his shots are frightening for their movement. When Lang wants to show fear he succeeds in doing it exclusively by the direct relationship between the actors and the decor. This interests me more at this particular moment.

Hitchcock's effect on the spectator is purely a physical one. In Hitchcock you see the person who is fearful, in Lang you see not only the person who is fearful but also you feel fear yourself.

In other words, Lang's audience relates to the character and Hitchcock's audience relates to the situation and the technique.

Exactly. When I see films by Fritz Lang now, I feel that I completely understand how he made the film.

How much time do you spend in preparation or rehearsal?

Very little. I try to spend as much time shooting as I can because I like shooting the best.

When do you work things out with your actors?

At lunch.

The dialogue in ***Le Boucher*** *is very simple.*

Yes, I used only three hundred words in the film. When you have only three hundred very simple words in a film, one word that is a little strange is very noticeable.

Do you prefer to write your own screenplays?

When I'm writing an original I prefer to write alone, but when I'm adapting a novel that must be read and reread, I prefer to have someone else do all the work.

Which of your films do you like the best?

It's easier to tell you right now what I don't like than what I do like. Right at this moment however, I prefer **Le Boucher**, but tomorrow who knows! The films that I like the best are always the films that have been filmed well—the films that have been a pleasant experience to make.

In both ***This Man Must Die*** *and* ***Le Boucher*** *you show water at the end. What does this signify to you?*

I honestly don't know. I just can't keep from doing it. I am obsessed by water and by the colour blue. When I can, I use water or blue somewhere in all of my films. I don't know why really, I only know that it is an obsession.

You were a critic with Cahiers du Cinéma *when you made your first feature film. Have you always wanted to direct films or did your interests just grow in that direction from writing about them?*

I was a film fanatic from an early age. As a critic I didn't think of making movies, I *dreamed*. I had many dreams of making many movies. I was very modest, I only dreamed.

How did you come to make your first feature?

I actually made my first film through the death of my Grandmother. She left me some money, not enough to have a grand life, just enough to make a movie.

After ***The Night Visitor*** *what will your next movie be about?*

About a young man who deliberately, quite deliberately, violates the ten commandments—one each day.

What will it be called?

Ten Day Wonder. It's from a novel by Ellery Queen. I've suppressed Ellery Queen, but I'm very faithful to the rest of the story.

Noah James

arcmt 2021

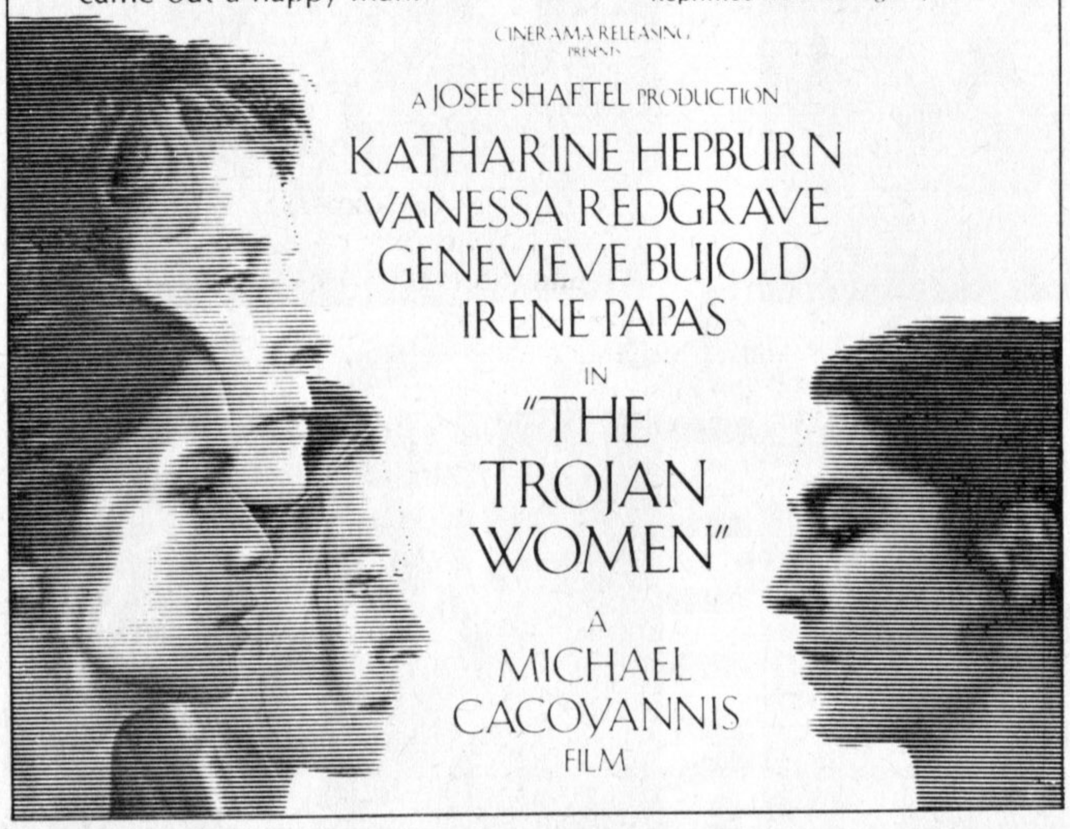
EURIPIDES, WITH TEARS IN ONE'S EYES...
By Eugène Ionesco

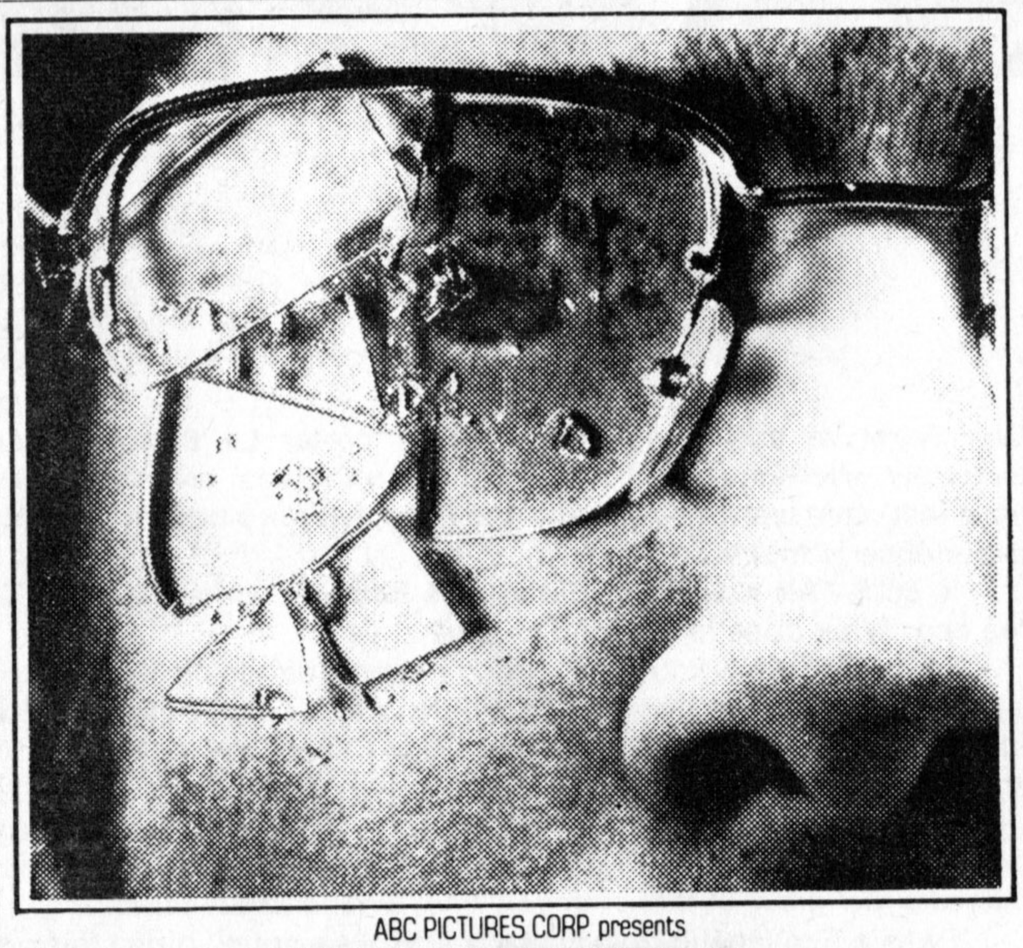
"I have just seen 'The Trojan Women,' the new Michael Cacoyannis film. The tragic grandeur of Euripides is rendered to the full both pictorially and vocally.

The film is harsh, simple, true. Cacoyannis leaves the word to Euripides, the text grips us with the same force as the sublime beauty of the images, stark, violent against the nudity of the landscape. It all leaps into our eyes and **the greatness of the work invades us,** the evidence of our tragic existence is revealed to us, clearly, from the beginning right through to the end.

That our existence should be tragic, that the war that man wages against man should be part of our destiny and at the same time that this eternal tragedy should be so great, is the paradoxical comfort that we draw from watching this film. I came out a happy man."

Reprinted from Le Figaro, Paris





ABC PICTURES CORP. presents

DUSTIN HOFFMAN

in SAM PECKINPAH'S

"STRAW DOGS"

A DANIEL MELNICK Production

Starring SUSAN GEORGE as Amy

Music by JERRY FIELDING Screenplay by DAVID ZELAG GOODMAN and SAM PECKINPAH Produced by DANIEL MELNICK Directed by SAM PECKINPAH

A SUBSIDIARY OF THE AMERICAN BROADCASTING COMPANIES, INC. [COLOR] DISTRIBUTED BY CINERAMA RELEASING

R RESTRICTED Under 17 requires accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian

THE FOUR MARX BROTHERS

Groucho
Harpo
Chico
Zeppo

THEIR FIVE FIRST AND FUNNIEST FILMS:

Cocoanuts (1929)
Animal Crackers (1930)
Monkey Business (1931)
Horse Feathers (1932)
Duck Soup (1933)

Plus:

W.C. Fields (19 features)
Mae West (9 features)

UNIVERSAL 16

2450 Victoria Park Ave.
Willowdale 425, Ontario

416-491-3000

arcmi 2021

MON ONCLE ANTOINE

A National Film Board of Canada Production. 1971. Eastmancolor. 110 min. Director: Claude Jutra. Screenplay: Clement Perron. Camera: Michel Brault. Music: Jean Cousineau. Cast: Jacques Gagnon. Lyne Champagne. Jean Duceppe. Monique Mercure. Lionel Villeneuve. Olivette Thibault. Helene Loiselle. Claude Jutra.

Québec's Claude Jutra has never been a very popular filmmaker among the critics of his native province. For some reason, he seems to have been excluded from that closed circuit of Québec critic-Québec filmmaker, in which everyone scratches each others back in the comfort of the locked screening room. In the book "Le Cinéma Québécois", Jutra is dismissed in a page as a rather superficial filmmaker, glib and fond of tricks, but of little substantial interest. Jutra's lack of favour with the critics stems from his refusal to be fashionable. He has always been genuinely experimental in his approach to films, exploring what can be done with the medium and at the same time using it as a very personal expression of his own concerns and preoccupations.

Jutra has spent much of his cinematic career, like Proust, trying to recapture memory clusters of his own past. His first feature film, **A tout prendre** (1963), is a semi-confessional reliving of an old love affair. The film stars himself and his old girlfriend. **Wow** (1969), his last film, is a successful attempt to get under the skin of a group of young dropouts for whom Jutra feels an obvious affinity.

Clément Perron, who wrote the script of **Mon Oncle Antoine** based on childhood memories and a sharp eye for the realities of Québec rural life, is a director in his own right. One of his short films, **Jour après jour**, detailing the routine of a small town lumber mill, presents one of the most devastating portraits of modern industrialism ever put on film.

A recent winner of eight prizes at the Canadian Film Awards, **Mon Oncle Antoine** is now widely recognized as one of the best films ever to come out of this country. It emerges as a rich, multi-levelled portrait of a young boy experiencing the first pangs of growing up through the medium of his uncle's general store. Perron provides the background—the general store which doubles as the mortuary around which life and death in the mining town centers; the town itself, owned by the English (who throw gifts to the population at Christmas, like a farmer feeding his chickens) and worked by the French who curse the Anglais and drink their beer. Jutra, on the other hand, provides the splendid, sometimes sentimental portrait of the young boy growing up—a portrait hinted at in the last scene of **Wow**. Through his eyes we see the adult world: weak, dishonest, mysterious and boring. Like the Czech films of a few years ago, comedy and tragedy are mixed together in unseemly proximity—just as they are in real life. There are no stereotypes in this film, no villains, no heros—just people captured with an accuracy and portrayed with a sensitivity seldom seen in films produced on this side of the ocean.

Several years ago, Jutra made a speech to the Cinémathèque in which he pointed out that the Quebec cinema, despite its voluminous literature, despite its gaggle of critics and publicity, does not exist. It has no audience and no public. Outside of Quebec it is unknown, and inside of Quebec nobody actually pays to see it. The press screening is often the only screening where anyone shows up. Aside from the recent wave of locally produced sex films, Jutra's words are still true today.

The Province of Quebec or the Country of Quebec, with its five million French-speaking people swimming in a sea of English, has nothing to sell but its own uniqueness. A film like **Mon Oncle Antoine** points the way, for it is at once profoundly regional and profoundly universal. It demonstrates that if you are an acute observer, if you truly know your own people—warts and all—then you will have something to say to everyone.

Ronald Blumer

VANISHING POINT

It doesn't matter who starred in **Vanishing Point**, or who directed it. It's not a movie so much as a symptom. The performances range from workmanlike to silly, the direction is militantly ordinary, the writing is bathetic and embarassing. Oh, **Vanishing Point** is not a super-bad movie—it moves along briskly enough, all things considered, and it's always nice to see the immense vistas of the American West photographed at more or less the right exposure.

Ronald Blumer is a PhD candidate in film at Montreal's McGill University, and a free-lance filmmaker and writer.

But **Vanishing Point** is almost pure youth-cult bullshit, and anything that pure makes a servicable vehicle for consideration of the genre. But first, film buffs, the plot: A 30ish fellow (Barry Somebody—who cares?) earns his living by driving cars from San Francisco to Denver and back again — you know, somebody wants his car in Denver but he doesn't want to drive it himself so he hires a service to drive it there. Barry is the fellow who does that. We discover, through an inept compilation of flashbacks, that Barry is an ex-war hero, ex-cop (he left the force after he hit a fellow officer who was molesting a teenage girl drug suspect) and ex-race driver who is Bitter, in the same way that Bogart and Garfield were Bitter, except not really.

For the usual existential reasons (which means that the director does not have the wit to invent a credible real-world explanation), Barry has promised to get a Dodge Charger from Denver to San Francisco in something like 15 to 16 hours — that's hard drivin', friend. As might be expected, he exceeds the speed limit and quickly becomes the object of the attentions of the local constabulary. He evades the cops neatly two or three times, driving on the wrong side of the road and off the road and other nifty stuff. A couple of times he runs the cops off the road, but he *always* stops to see that they're unhurt before roaring on. That's how you know he's the hero.

After 45 minutes or so of colorful driving, Barry is forced off the road in Nevada and drives off across the desert, headed God only knows where—for an authentic American hero, he's not very bright. Out among the sand dunes, he meets his first Symbolic Character, an old prospector (Dean Jagger, having a high old time spitting through his beard and acting canny) who catches snakes for a pasty-faced revivalist (the brilliant Severn Darden, now fallen to this low estate). Singing in the revivalist's tent show are Delany and Bonnie and Friends, the obligatory rock and roll stars. Subsequently, Barry encounters two hitchhiking homosexuals who turn out to be stickup artists, and a desert hippie and his old lady who help Barry elude the California Highway Patrol.

Interwoven into this plot is a blind black disc jockey named Super Soul who monitors police radio bands and spills the law enforcement beans between rock and roll records. Super Soul gets into Barry's dilemma, tells his audience about him and occasionally offers advice. It's Super Soul, poor fellow, who is given all the heavy-handed raps about how Barry is the Last American Hero and a symbol of Freedom against Tyranny and all that, just in case you missed the Theme of the Film.

The Movie finally ends with a massive roadblock in California, during which bulldozers are set up in the middle of the road and phalanxes of police cars are dispatched to surround poor Barry. He makes another existential decision and accelerates his machine smack into the bulldozers, thereby ending the film in a satisfactory ball of fire and (of course) making the Point that it is better to die a free man than live in chains. The Spirit of Liberty lives on, however, persumably in the hearts of the cretins who gather around the smoking wreckage.

Whew.

(Continued . . .)

2021

Vanishing Point fails on virtually every level it pretends to exist on. It's supposed to be a youth movie, and therefore to be speaking to people who know something about driving cars long distances and living off the land and dealing with the authorities and all that. And yet: Barry eludes the Utah cops by driving into Nevada, thereby forcing them to screech to a halt at the state line. Yet the universally-recognized "hot pursuit" dictum would certainly allow the police to continue chasing Barry until they caught him. Barry hears Super Soul on the radio throughout the journey, yet KOW (Super Soul's station—that's the level of humor the movie lives on) is quite plainly a small-town rock and roll station and is probably not audible in the next county, much less across three states. When Barry first meets the hippie couple, the woman is completely nude, riding aimlessly around the desert on a small motorbike. I challenge anyone to ride a motorcycle over sand, completely naked, in 120 degree heat and not experience anything other than exquisite discomfort shading into pain, yet this lady looks like a Madonna. It is to laugh.

These kinds of complaints, incidentally, are not the same thing as those "why-didn't-they-just-go-to-the-police" charges that are often leveled against Hitchcock films. The mildly illogical behavior in Hitchcock movies procedes inevitably from the fantastic elements in the plot—international spy rings, elaborate traps and disguises, etc. In other words, the conventions of melodrama. But **Vanishing Point** isn't a melodrama, it's just a film about an unremarkable fellow who drives too fast. He's supposed to be living in the real world, and therefore the details of that real world should be at least marginally accurate. The film, like **Easy Rider**, stands first on its ability to convey accurately what it's like to drive long distances. And yet the people who made **Vanishing Point** clearly have no idea what that feels like. They've got the smells and the tastes all wrong.

It's on the level of characterization, however, that the bullshit really begins to shine through. The film pretends to be a youth movie because it glorifies the outlaw, expressing the legitimate notion that deviant behavior in an insane society is not only okay but to be encouraged. Yet those bets are all hedged. Barry isn't an outlaw at all—the film makes it clear that, even if he's caught, all he can be busted for is dangerous driving and resisting arrest. Misdemeanors, both of them. Six months in the can, maximum. So Barry isn't *really* an outlaw, he's just *acting* like an outlaw because it's more fun. If that's heroism, I'll take the astronauts.

And then we have the homosexual robbers. We first encounter them as outrageous, flaming fags, and the film has a couple of minutes of good leering fun with them mincing and lisping according to the best nightclub comedian stereotypes. Then, when one of them pulls a gun on Barry and demands money, our hero dispatches both of them with comic ease. Queers are sissies, everybody knows that. They just can't use their fists. So much for tolerance of deviant behavior in the Brave New World of **Vanishing Point**.

Then the hippie lady. After getting off her motorbike and exchanging no more than ten words with Barry, she offers herself to him. Those hippie chicks, they sure do love to ball. Just once, *just once*, I'd like to see a youthcult movie in which women are portrayed as more-or-less ordinary sexual beings instead of mindless balling machines.

And the villains. Boy, am I tired of inept cops as villains. It's politically dishonest (the problem with the bad cops is that they're extremely efficient, and much better equipped to chase you than you are to elude them) and dramatically boring—what is required for true conflict are villains who are just as resourceful and human as the hero, but guided by different motives. And I'm tired of cops as villains on another level—cops are just lower middle class civil servants; the true villains, if any, are the people who employ the cops.

Of course, the filmmakers would argue that the real enemy is The System, which is a tired cop-out for people who don't know how to create characters.

(Lest you should think that the people in charge of **Vanishing Point** have left out the other standard youthcult villains, the mindless rednecks, be advised that Super Soul is assaulted by a gang of thugs who appear to have been transported intact from rural Mississippi. The filmmakers are pathetically anxious to let you know that they're on Our Side all the way.)

In fact, **Vanishing Point** is a drama of conflict between stick figures. It's a lazy, self-indulgent movie made by people who think they've done their job if they make the Individual the hero and Authority the villain. It wouldn't be worth all this space if it didn't represent a trend in commercial filmmaking. I've seen too many movies like this one, whose only claim to our consideration is that they stand for the Right Things. Except they don't know what the right things really are, and they don't have enough imagination to people the movie with human beings. In a world crammed with honest to God problems, these characters invent their own difficulties for the hell of it. While pretending to deal with Everything, **Vanishing Point** is about nothing at all.

Burn this movie.

Jon Carroll

Cine Books

692a Yonge
Toronto
964-6474

The Marx Brothers at the Movies; Zimmerman, Paul D.: $1.25
Comedy Films, 1894-1954; Montgomery, J.: $9.75
The Marx Brothers, Their World of Comedy; Eyles, A.: $1.25
The Camera and I; Ivens, Joris: $2.45
The Citizen Kane Book - Raising Kane; Kael, P.: (Shooting script: Herman J. Mankiewicz & Welles): 440 pp.: stills: notes: hard-bound.

POSTERS
PRESS BOOKS
STILLS * FILM SCRIPTS

TAKE ONE BACK ISSUES ARE GOING FAST!!! GET YOURS WHILE THE SUPPLY LASTS!!!

Vol. 1, No. 1: $4.00 each
Vol. 1, No. 3: $4.00 each
Vol. 1, No. 4: $2.00 each
Vol. 1, No. 5: $3.00 each
Vol. 1, No. 6: $3.50 each
Vol. 1, No. 7: $0.75 each
Vol. 1, No. 8: $0.75 each
Vol. 1, No. 9: $0.75 each
Vol. 1, No. 10: $3.00 each
Vol. 1, No. 11: $1.50 each
Vol. 1, No. 12: $3.00 each
Vol. 2, No. 2: $0.50 each
Vol. 2, No. 3: $2.00 each
Vol. 2, No. 4: $2.00 each
Vol. 2, No. 5: $0.50 each
Vol. 2, No. 6: $0.25 each
Vol. 2, No. 7: $0.25 each
Vol. 2, No. 7: $0.25 each
Vol. 2, No. 8: $0.25 each
Vol. 2, No. 9: $0.25 each
Vol. 2, No. 10: $1.50 each
Vol. 2, No. 11: $1.50 each

DERBY

Director/Photographer: Robert Kaylor. Assistant Cameramen: Steve Ward and Robert Kenner. Sound: Tony Donovan. Gaffer: Sal Barone. Editor: Anthony Potenza. Producer: William Richert. Executive Producer: L. S. Fields. Featuring: Charlie O'Connell, and all the other stars of the Roller Derby: Mike Snell, his wife Christina, his brother Butch, his father, and his friends. A Jerry Seltzer-Michael Hamilburg Film Presentation. Distributed by Cinerama Releasing. 91 minutes.

Robert Kaylor's **Derby** adds a great deal of stature to the current documentary scene. The film has been around for a while, picking up acclaim at film festivals in San Francisco and Dallas. It was commissioned by the Roller Derby, which paid the bills and is satisfied with it as exemplary promotional material.

It would be fair to say that **They Shoot Horses, Don't They?** performed a service for dance marathons similar to that done for the Roller Derby, by Kaylor, but the difference is that the Derby, spawned also during depression years, is still a living, breathing

---

Jon Carroll, a man of few words, most of them misspelled, had never written a work in his life until he picked up a decaying copy of Argosy *and saw an ad for the Infamous Writers School. "Well, shit," he thought to himself, "I bet I can make more money writing than in the live bait game." Quick as a wink, he sat down at his desk and penned the instant overground classic, "Potato Weevils — Romantic Pest of the Great Plains." Says Mr. Carroll: "Thanks to Infamous Writers School, my teeth are like iron and I can hear the radio again." (More recently, Mr. Carroll has been managing editor of* Rags, *associate editor of* Rolling Stone, *and a freelance contributor to* Esquire. *—Ed.)*

American reality without any nostalgic quality to romanticize it. And of course **Derby** is a documentary, the real thing, unrehearsed and spontaneous to a very great extent, though we must naturally acknowledge certain necessary editorial manipulations and a 10 to 1 ratio of film shot to final print. But Kaylor, director and photographer, does let his subjects speak for themselves, in word and in deed, to indict, enlighten, amuse, surprise. Real people emerge from this film, people to be remembered. Considering the fact that Kaylor had only three days advance notice before he began work on the film, it becomes apparent that the film was for him a real process of discovery. He does a lot with his material, allowing the violence, contrived and otherwise, of the derby spectacle itself to serve as an exhilirating counterpoint to the lives we see "behind the scenes". If the film has any disconcerting weakness it is that we are sometimes made a bit too aware of the camera—as during a dialogue between two lady members of the derby. During this scene, which takes place in a moving car, one of the ladies is in the back seat, very obviously to allow Kaylor to situate his camera in front. Yet such occasions provide only slight distractions, and it would be unfair to exaggerate their effect on the film's integrity.

Spokesman for the Roller Derby itself is Charlie O'Connell, an ace performer in his field who has spent a score of years on roller skates. At a point in life when his dreams are nearly fulfilled, he shows us the neighborhood park in New York where he first tried out his skates as a kid, and later his expensive home in California, complete with swimming pool. This is the true dream of the derby members, he tells us.

Early in the film Charlie O'Connell interviews a derby hopeful, Mike Snell, who becomes the real star of **Derby.** Snell has a wife and two kids, works for the Dayton Tire and Rubber Company in Ohio, and takes home about $150 a week minus a few loan payments. He is unfaithful to his wife, it seems, every chance he gets, but she takes it in stride, as she does Mike's brother Butch, who spends a great deal of time perusing *Playboy* and refuses to look for a job. (In one scene Christina Snell argues with Butch about various things, but her main gripe is that Butch has apparently stolen the raisins she likes to put in her spaghetti sauce. It's hard not to sympathize with the boy on this point.) Butch becomes a very effective addition to the film's lineup of characters—the Peter Ustinov of Middle America, as Andrew Sarris has described him. Butch has a refreshing reason for not wanting to get drafted and sent to Viet Nam: he is simply afraid to go. He sits in front of the television, a look of dumb cunning on his face. We don't doubt his sincerity either.

Mike Snell is told by Charlie O'Connell that he must go to training school in San Francisco for six weeks before he can be considered for derby duty. While Mike is making plans for his big move, we get a chance to listen to several of the derby stars and a few of Snell's friends. We discover gun-toting tendencies in both groups, an acute concern with violence, sex, and money.

We go back again and again to the knockabout speed of the Roller Derby, with an occasional glimpse at the avid fans—there are some fine shots taken by skaters wheeling around the track with cameras. Men and women beat up on other men and women. It doesn't matter whether they're black or white, as long as they're on the other team. As told by derby star Eddie Krebs, you just keep getting up no matter how many times you are knocked down. As he is interviewed, part of the time with a gun in his hand, in his quiet motel room, Krebs tries to verbalize his philosophy of life with the derby as metaphor. Kaylor intercuts the interview with shots of Krebs getting pulverized by opposing team members. He keeps getting up.

The film ends with Mike Snell soon to embark on his journey to fame and fortune. Kaylor tells us that Mike Snell did indeed finish his six-week training period in three weeks and is now a star of Roller Derby—with aspirations of becoming a movie star. His derby experience has landed him in the hospital three times.

Kaylor, who started out as a still photographer, usually makes films with his wife Phoebe. His two most recent documentaries, **Max-Out** and **Taking Care of Business,** were concerned with ex-convicts. **Derby,** however, is his first full-length documentary and gives strong evidence that Kaylor has a promising future in film. His next project is to explore, via film, the subculture of carnival life in the United States. The results should be something to look forward to.

E. Michael Desilets

Michael Desilets has written articles on film for: Film Library Quarterly, Journal of Popular Culture, *and* Filmograph.

ANNOUNCING: THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF CZECH FILM MAKING!!

The postwar history of Czechoslovakia has been troubled and tragic. It is altogether astonishing that these beleaguered people were able to give to the world—in a few brief years—some of the finest, best-loved films ever made.

Intimately involved in Czech cinema in its great days, Josef Skvorecky tells its story—the difficulties, the triumphs—very much from the inside. Published jointly by the film magazine TAKE ONE and Peter Martin Associates, **All the Bright Young Men and Women** is a fascinating picture of the swift flowering of a major art in a most difficult environment. Readers will be fascinated by the many photographs and the marvelous narrative—informative, funny, strange, sad and enchanting.

Skvorecky is a Czech writer, film maker and jazz expert with a towering international reputation. His novel, **The Cowards**, finally published in Britain and the U.S. in 1970, has won him new acclaim in the English-speaking world.

SPECIAL MONEY-SAVING OFFER TO READERS OF THIS MAGAZINE

Take One, Box 1778, Station B, Montreal 110, Canada

Please send me as quickly as possible copies of **All the Bright Young Men and Women** at the special price of just $7.95 per copy (regularly $8.95 in all bookstores). I enclose my cheque or money order. You pay postage and shipping costs. If I am not absolutely satisfied, I may return my books within fifteen days for a full refund.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ Prov/State_____ Zone/Zip_____

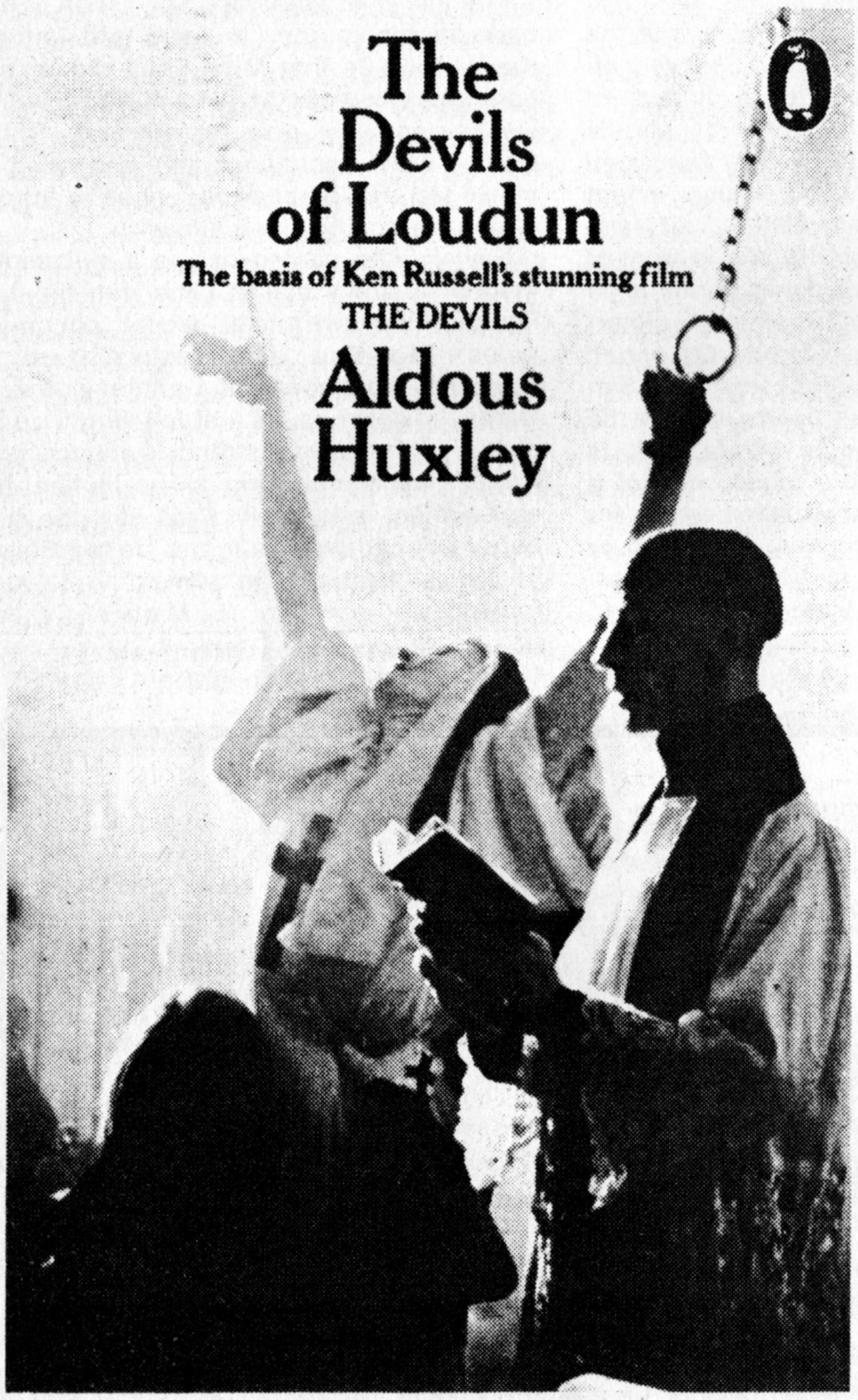
arcmt 2021

A DEVILISHLY GOOD BOOK!

The Devils of Loudun

The basis of Ken Russell's stunning film
THE DEVILS

Aldous Huxley



Urbain Grandier was burned at the stake
at Loudun, France in 1634,
accused of being the sorcerer responsible
for the possession by devils
of a whole convent of nuns who fell
regularly into obscene and heretical frenzies.
Huxley's gripping history provided the basis
for Ken Russell's current controversial movie,
starring Vanessa Redgrave and Oliver Reed.

Don't miss it! Now playing at your local bookstore. $1.65

"BRILLIANT. THE AUTHOR WOULD RELISH SO FAITHFUL AN INTERPRETATION OF HIS WORK A BEAUTIFULLY MADE FILM."

By the winner of the 1970 Nobel Prize for Literature

ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN'S

ONE DAY

IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH

By the winner of the 1970 Nobel Prize for Literature

G ALL AGES ADMITTED General Audiences

FROM CINERAMA RELEASING

DONALD PLEASENCE · FRANCOISE DORLEAC · LIONEL STANDER in

Roman Polanski's

CUL-DE-SAC (Blind Alley)

"BEST FILM" 1966 BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

"CRITICS AWARD" 1966 VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

Menzel's

CLOSELY WATCHED TRAINS

"The best movie I have seen this year." *Life*

Brynych's

THE FIFTH HORSEMAN IS FEAR

"Brilliantly accomplished!" *Saturday Review*

Canadian distribution by:

CINEMA IMAGES

221 Victoria Street, Toronto 205, Canada
(416) 362-2321
Cable: Intelfilm, Toronto

Write for catalogue.

RIP-OFF

A Phoenix Film Production, Color, 91 min., 35 mm.; Screenplay: William Fruet; Cinematography: Richard Leiterman; Editing: Don Shebib, Tony Lower; Music: Murray McLauchlen, Gene Martynic; Produced by Bennet Fode; Directed by Don Shebib; Cast: Don Scardino, Sue Helen Petrie, Ralph Endersby, Mike Kukulewich, Peter Gross, Hugh Webster; 1971.

Don Shebib's **Goin' Down The Road** began with a $19,000 grant from the Canadian Film Development Corporation. Over a two year period of stops and starts it was completed for $82,000, and greeted with high acclaim when released. (From the same lot of grants, Sylvia Spring made **Madeleine Is** with assistance from John Bassett's Agincourt Productions, Peter Rowe created **The Neon Palace** with Film Canada's participation, and my own film **Man In Pieces** — suspended for over a year while **Columbus of Sex** did battle with Canadian courts — will be the last project to emerge from the group).

Goin' Down The Road received the Canadian Film Award's Etrog as Best Picture of 1970. Critics Clyde Gilmour and Judith Crist cited it as one of ten best of the year. Shebib wasn't as fond of the film as many critics were (he regards **Good Times, Bad Times** as his best film to date) but unquestionably **Goin' Down The Road** is one of the landmarks of Canadian cinema. It offered a documentary style wedded to a wry, ironic humanism, finely nuanced performances, Bruce Cockburn's haunting songs, and Richard Leiterman's alert, sensitive photography. One felt that the material had been transformed by inspiration — that Shebib *had* to make the film because the story was inside him and he had to express it. Which is, in my view, the only reason a movie should ever be made. It doesn't, in itself, guarantee a great film, but to work on any other basis is just adding more superfluous junk to an already large pile of uninspired movies.

I approached **Rip-Off** with the fairly high expectations that a new film by Shebib deserves. He has never made a poor film. Among Canadian directors he is one of our most dependable talents. Its theme — the experiences of four youths in their last year at high school — didn't interest me because nearly everyone flounders when they do a "youth movie." The basic problem is that adolescence (though it may be the most melodramatic period in a person's life) isn't cinematically interesting. But, I thought, if anyone can do it well, it's probably Shebib. I don't know how deeply Shebib sees into people (or that he even wants to) but he has a respect for people that I admire. He deflates the fatuous. He has a no-nonsence approach to life that is equally sceptical of the Establishment's sacred cows and counter-cultural fads and catchphrases.

For various reasons, I came away from the initial screening feeling disappointed. The material is thin and Shebib seems to be marking time. As a theatre booker I back the film entirely — Canadian filmmakers and the public deserve every opportunity to become better acquainted — but as a critic I have no option but to note my reservations.

There were isolated moments in **Goin' Down The Road** where Shebib seemed intent upon injecting some "soul" into his characters. I've never found believable the scene where Joey and Betty sit in their tenement flat quietly, almost reverently, while Peter plays Satie compositions on the phonograph. The characters in **Goin' Down The Road** are so well drawn, and moving in their own right, that they don't need such falsification. In **Rip-Off** we follow the comic misadventures of four high-school chums as they make a dreadful home movie, form a dreadful rock band called **Arctic Madness,** try to form a commune (at the end of four days they can't stand one another's company) and so on. They bungle everything they attempt to do. The only way to laugh is to laugh *at* them, but I don't enjoy laughing that way, and I find **Rip-Off**'s patterns predictable and not particularly comic. A 1971 version of the Bowery Boys is much less than Shebib is capable of offering.

I admire the film for its refusal to pander — it doesn't depict parents as shrill, neurotic harpies, and it doesn't give adolescents a self-congratulatory snow-job. The touches of "soul" which in my view marred **Goin' Down The Road** (though only peripherally), have taken over in **Rip-Off.** Shebib is, I believe, trying too hard not to be derivative, not to repeat himself, but in so doing he's refusing to draw upon his strengths, and striking out in an ill-advised direction.

Sue-Helen Petrie is a great discovery and one need only see her paltry performance in **Loving and Laughing** to discern how well Shebib directs his actors. None of the four youths — Don Scardino, Ralph Endersby, Mike Kukulewich, Peter Gross — are in the acting class of **Goin' Down The Road**'s Paul Bradley and Doug McGrath, but both Endersby and Kukulewich have an undeniable presence, while Scardino (who played the lead in John Trent's **Homer**) will, I hope, be able to retire early from films, or else, like Peter Kastner and Michael Sarrazin, specialize in American movies that I feel free to avoid.

Rip-Off is one of the first "light entertainment" films produced in Canada. **Face-Off** (premiering in November) is the second, and it's even more crassly exploitive. We're apparently in for a whole cycle of shallow, glossy productions that will culminate with Cinepix producing **Fuck-Off.** After sitting through the screenings at the recent Canadian Film Awards, I felt that, with the wonderful exception of Claude Jutra's **Mon Oncle Antoine**, it was time to develop a more rewarding interest — skin diving or the Australian novel.

John Hofsess

John Hofsess, a TAKE ONE Contributing Editor, is also film critic for Maclean's Magazine and a prize-winning independent filmmaker. At the moment, he is starting work on a book that will analyse Russian and American "pop cultures".

SWEET SWEETBACK'S BADASS SONG

Written, composed, produced, directed, and edited by: Melvin Van Peebles. Director of Photography: Bob Maxwell. Production Manager and Assistant Director: Clyde Houston. Sound: Clark Will. Assistant Editor: Jerry Hoenack. Cast: The Black Community, Brer Soul. 97 min. Distributed by Cinemation Industries.

Sweet Sweetback's Badass Song is a violent film, an extreme film, and a black film. It is a film "of" Melvin Van Peebles (as the credits say in the French style) and I would suppose that Van Peebles meant that preposition to indicate "about" as well as "by". It stars Van Peebles, it was written and directed by Van Peebles, produced by him and edited and composed by him. The work, certainly, of an auteur with a highly developed, individual, and, most importantly, *black* style.

The plot: Stud Sweetback works in a brothel as the male star of the show. The owner of the house lends Sweetback to the police for an evening so they can go through the motions of "interrogating a suspect." On their way to the stationhouse they are sidetracked to a community disturbance. They pick up a young, Pantherish guy. They beat him and kick him (in gruesome, graphic detail). Sweetback, the cool stud, is finally moved to action. He stomps the cops unconsciousness. Then he begins to run. He runs for the rest of the film.

The images of the film fall quite neatly into three classic categories which triangulate (and strangulate) black life in these United States.

People run ("Keep this Nigger boy running" says the note in "Invisible Man.")

People stomp and kick and shot and cut.

People fuck (they don't "make love," they don't "have sex," it's pure badass fuckin', as in Moothaa— FUCKKaah!!)

The narrative is boring as such. Sweetback runs an inordinate amount, which becomes boring very quickly. The mutilation, stomping, and killing is gut-churning each time it happens, but the *story* of it becomes boring too, as it is so commonplace in this film's world. Even the fucking becomes boring. The peace that comes with "making love" never arrives here; it can't, in the world of the film—which is one of the important political points that the film makes. Finally, the narrative is boring for technical reasons. The film reaches a high pitch of passion even before the credits begin, and it stays there until shortly before the end. It has nowhere to go, neither up (there is no greater passion) or down (because the agony won't have its release until there is some kind of peace for Black people in this country).

But if the narrative is boring, the spiritual impact is harrowing and almost sublime. In its ability to communicate pure agony **Sweet Sweetback** is unrivalled, save maybe by the TV news . . . The film is a gluttonous accretion of pain. One wants to vomit in the lobby after the show. But the pain with which Van Peebles washes the screen is supposed to be transmuted into anger, and then into political purpose. Whether it is for black viewers of the film, I really can't guess. I'm white. I think, however, that that kind of political catharsis is where the film fails most evidently. It seems to me that black people already know the picture Van Peebles paints. In this sense, the film is not raising awareness (at least among black audiences). Sweetback finally escapes to Mexico, leaving the carcasses of the hounds sent to rip him to shreds floating bloodily in the Rio Grande. We cheer, we are relieved. But what then? A series of titles comes on the screen: Watch out. Watch out. Somewhere there's a Badass Black Man who will return for revenge. But it's hard to believe. Sweetback's whole drama is so existential and individual that it is difficult to see how his

James Monaco is a lecturer in Film and Drama at New York's New School for Social Research. He is also the author of three AFI pamphlets: "An Introduction to Film Technique", "A Glossary of Film Terms" and "A Bibliography of Film Literature".

arcmtl 2021

THEATRICAL AND TELEVISION FILMS WITH THE CONTEMPORARY, SWINGING FEEL* FROM THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

*We also make films for people over 22

National Film Board of Canada **Office national du film du Canada**

Canada
P.O. Box 6100
Montreal 101, Quebec

United States
Suite 819
680 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10019

Europe
1 Grosvenor Square
London W.1, England

15, rue de Berri
Paris 8e, France

archive 2021

anger can become a powerful political force.

If the film is no more successful than any other as a political instrument, it certainly succeeds as a delineation of Sweetback's world. **Sweet Sweetback's Badass Song** is a song of pain so excruciating that no realistic technique could serve to limn it on a movie screen. Van Peebles attempts to expand our emotions with the technical apparatus of the film medium: slow motion, freeze frames, double and triple exposures, multiple images, split screen, color reversals and re-reversals (very effective), and the most complex montage I have ever seen this side of Stan Brakhage. In great measure, I think he succeeds: the images are extreme because the emotions are extreme. The film is psychedelic because the pain is psychedelic. Dialogue is less than secondary in this film: words fail: Sweetback says less than 10 words throughout the film. In general, dialogue scenes are used as bridges—and breathers—between the successive, close peaks of passion.

One of the more fascinating metaphors of the film is the sexual activity. It is explicit and copious. To white eyes, at first it seems exploitative. Why all this lovemaking if **Badass Song** is a film with a political point to make, dedicated to "All the Brothers and Sisters who have had enough of the man," starring "Melvin Van Peebles and the Black Community," and ending with a stern warning that jumps from the screen? Why are all these people having fun? It even seems as if it should be comedic (although one *feels* that it's not) that Sweetback can stop running, with helicopters overhead and sheriffs closing in, to get laid in the bushes. But the sex isn't comedic, and it isn't exploitative. It isn't even erotic, despite (or because of) its detail, because it isn't "lovemaking," it's "fucking", with all the negative connotations of that word. Love isn't even a concept in this film of pain. Although there are shots aplenty of "ecstasy", there isn't one of true orgasmic release unless it is in Sweetback's escape—catharsis being true orgasm.

More important than sex, as a recurrent motif, is violence. And here, Van Peebles is morally irreproachable (as few filmmakers have been since **Bonnie and Clyde**). First, the violence is rooted in a very honest reality, and second, the violent sequences have been shot with obvious care and evident ethical concern. There is a sense of necessity in every shot of a wound, every trickle of blood; a sense which it is difficult to describe literally. Violence is, after all, the great American metaphor; it is also a metaphor with myriad possibilities, as Sergio Leone has shown us, for describing the heart of America.

Interesting, too, is Van Peebles' conception of race. The whites in the film are not all slimy, washed-out, mewling and puking, like the Police Commissioner. Rather, the L.A., cops are mod-ly longhaired and friendly in their viciousness. The man with the hounds at the end of the film is a young Texas-hippie type. Sweetback has an ugly run-in with Hell's Angels who at first seem to be friendly to him. They aren't even neutral. But finally, one of the few people to help Sweetback, even if in a minor way, is a white country type who exchanges clothes with him. "Why?" ask the sheriffs? "Because he reminded me of a buddy of mine I used to pal around with in Denver," replies the white man, simply and unpretentiously.

Above all, **Sweet Sweetback's Badass Song** is a black film—and maybe the first black film. I use the adjective "black" not just to indicate the race of the filmmaker and the area of his concern, but also to define a very specific and modern worldview. It is the consciousness, political and cultural, of the 1960s—of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, Tina Turner, Jimi Hendrix, and now Melvin Van Peebles. Like so many black artists before him, Van Peebles had to go to France to make his start (with **Story of a Three-Day Pass**). He came back to make **Watermelon Man**, but now he has apparently disavowed those first efforts. He says his career begins with **Sweet Sweetback**.

The film cannot, alas, be set in the tradition of black film because there is none to speak of. (Gordon Parks? Ossie Davis?) But **Sweet Sweetback** is, nonetheless, cut from the whole cloth of a long, general, artistic tradition. **Sweet Sweetback**, the character, stands shoulder to shoulder with the Invisible Man and Bigger Thomas (of "Native Son"). Like Invisible Man, Sweetback's odyssey is one of terror and confusion, learning the lessons intuited in childhood. It leads him underground, literally —into the sewers which were the refuge for Invisible Man. But in theme, Sweet Sweetback is much closer to "Native Son" than to "Invisible Man". Van Peebles' film clangs with hate like the frying pan Bigger Thomas throws at the rat. Like Sweetback, Bigger ran until he could run no longer through the jungle of cities. But Sweetback escapes and Bigger was caught (although he did achieve an existential free-

TAKE ONE

TAKE ONE MAKES A PERFECT GIFT
Special introductory six-issue subscriptions (one year) are only $1.50 apiece. After the first two, they're only $1.00 apiece.

And we'll send a gift card too.

Box 1778, Station B, Montréal 110, PQ

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
Province or State _____
Zip _____
Gift card to read _____
_____

arcmt 2021

dom of sorts in discovering that "they can't make me do nothin' but die."), and this is the essential difference between the Black worldview of the '40s and that of the '60s and '70s. Existential freedom is no longer the main solace; there is, at least, the possibility or the dream of political freedom—not just freedom inside your head, but freedom in the world as well. If **Sweet Sweetback** is not so perspicuous, subtle and complex as "Invisible Man" it is at least as powerful a cry from the heart as "Native Son."

(And here I catch myself in a little bit of natural racism. My white aesthetic values subtlety and complexity. The black aesthetic has never put so high a value on it, and for the most excellent of reasons: the abiding concern of black artists in this country is, of course, the black nation in this country. The forces that mold that nation are raw and vicious racist ones. Of this, one does not fashion Rohmeresque intellectual comedies.)

Finally, there is the old problem of "thefirstblack . . . " Yes, **Sweet Sweetback** is probably "thefirstblack film" in its way. (Please note that there *has* been an underground black film industry in this country for decades.) But, judged on its own terms, despite the political problems, despite the dramatic problems, Van Peebles has made a powerful, strong film in a new and effective way. **Sweet Sweetback's Badass Song** is an odyssey; in its own paralyzed and singular manner it's the hellish, earthly mirror of David Bowman's journey to apotheosis.

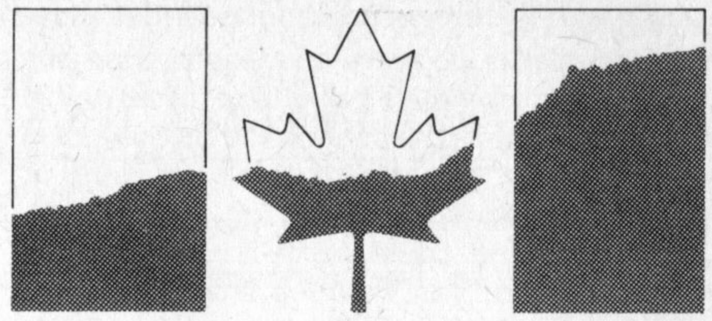
James Monaco

3-D returns
in a film that will scare you out of your seat:
EYES OF HELL in 3-D

A MERIDIAN FILMS PRODUCTION
DIRECTED BY JULIAN ROFFMAN
FROM NEW LINE CINEMA

"In the gruesome division, this is really very good."
—LOS ANGELES TIMES

Write for a free poster and complete film catalog.
New Line Cinema, 121 University Place, New York, N.Y. 10003/212 674-7460



IN THE WORKS

Herewith, as complete and up-to-date as we can make it, a necessarily brief summary of recent Canadian independent feature-film activity. Productions that have (to the best of our knowledge) received assistance from the Canadian Film Development Corporation are indicated by an asterisk. (Assembled with the assistance of the Cinémathèque Québécoise.)

Following-up our introductory report in the last issue of TAKE ONE, here are some of the more recent developments. First in Montreal and area:

Kino Productions, which was to have begun shooting on **Lies My Father Told Me*** (directed by Jan KADAR and starring Zero MOSTEL) this spring — and which already had another project or two in the wings — has sold its furniture and closed shop. The **Lies** project has been taken over by Pierre LAMY of Les Productions Carle-Lamy.

This latter firm (in which LAMY is joined by filmmakers Gilles CARLE and Jacques GAGNE, as well as production chief Louise RANGER) must surely be one of the busiest in Canada, with several features at various stages of production. Being readied for release are Jean-Claude LABRECQUE's **Les Smattes*** and Denys ARCAND's **Une maudite galette*** (which has recently changed title to **Calibre 45**); just completing shooting are CARLE's **La vraie nature de Bernadette Brown*** (starring Carle's latest discovery, Micheline LANCTOT, in a role that was first offered to Joanna SHIMKUS and Chantal RENAUD), and GAGNE's **La conquète***; to start shooting in February is Claude (**Mon Oncle Antoine**) JUTRA's next film, **Kamouraska***, which is to feature Geneviève BUJOLD in the lead role. A number of Carle-Lamy's films are co-produced with Jean-Pierre LEFEBVRE's firm, Cinak.

Expected to be ready soon is the first feature film of a young Saguenay filmmaker, Claude BERUBE: **Pas de jeu sans soleil***.

Meanwhile, Gordon SHEPPARD, writer and director of **Eliza's Horoscope***, is working ahead on the cutting of the film (which stars Elizabeth MOORMAN and Lila KEDROVA) in hopes of an early release (the picture is distributed world-wide by Warner Brothers).

And **Mon Oncle Antoine*** (finally enjoying extended theatrical runs in Toronto and Montreal) has won the Golden Hugo (for best film) and the Silver Hugo (for best screenplay) at Chicago's Seventh International Film Festival. This is the same film that took eight awards (including best film, best director, best script, and best music) at the otherwise disastrous Canadian Film Awards (see Toronto Letter).

On the Toronto scene, **Mahoney's Estate*** (with Alexis KANNER producing, scripting and starring, and Harvey HART directing) is now scheduled for a spring release, shooting

MILLIONAIRES:

We want your money—hundreds of thousands—for the best alternative magazine the United States has ever seen. It's called FLASH. Interested? Then contact Mr. Carroll, Rachael Productions, 2711 Woolsey St., Berkeley, California 94703.

having been completed. The film has a total budget of some $650,000; of which $250,000 has been invested by the Canadian Film Development Corporation, and the bulk of the rest from Channel 11 (Hamilton) and Robert Lawrence Productions (both controlled by the Southam Company).

Completion of **Golden Apples of the Sun** (scripted and directed by Barrie McCLEAN), on the other hand, has apparently been delayed by the necessity for more shooting. Gendon Films is set to distribute the Robert Lawrence Productions feature.

Tim BOND has suspended work on **Stop Me.**

Ken HUGHES, whose directing credits include (most recently) **Chitty Chitty Bang Band** and **Cromwell,** has confirmed that he has agreed to direct the film version of **Killing Ground.** Timothy FINDLEY will adapt the best-selling novel by Ellis PORTAL, which features political and military intrigue against a backdrop of French and English Canada. Peter O'BRIAN and Christopher DALTON will produce through their Toronto-based Muddy York Motion Pictures, with shooting scheduled for this coming spring and summer.

Lester PERSKY, at the same time, has announced that his company plans at least three more feature films to be made in Canada. PERSKY, who co-produced **Fortune and Men's Eyes*** is partnered in Cinemex of Canada by Lewis ALLEN, and together they have an option on the Quebec novel "La Guerre, Yes Sir!" (by Roch CARRIERE), which they plan to start shooting this winter. They also plan a film version of Dylan THOMAS's "Adventures in the Skin Trade", and a second film with **Fortune** director Harvey HART.

At more personal level, it was reported in mid-October that Doug McGRATH — faced with unemployment and an imminent rent bill — was attempting to auction off one scarcely-used 1970 Canadian Film Award. No report yet on how much McGrath (who won the award for his lead role in **Goin' Down the Road***) was able to raise.

In Vancouver, Tom SHANDEL's **Another Smith for Paradise*** is now set for release (through Astral Films) in January. The film, budgeted at $200,000, asks the burning question: "Can a Canadian Ukrainian named Shewchuck change his name to Smith and still overcome the two-headed meatgrinder of a Junior Arts League sense of culture, and success in the mining stock promotion game?"

The end of October saw the premiere (in six Vancouver-area theatres simultaneously) of **Travellin' Light.** The film was directed by Jack McCALLUM and executive produced by John BULL. Together they somehow managed to engage the participation of some 25 top country-and-western singers (including Hank Snow, Roy Clark and Sonny Curtis) for one heck of a C & W show.

Also completed, but still awaiting theatrical showings, are two other Vancouver-produced features: **Proxyhawk*** (16mm, b&w, 77 min.), scripted and directed by (and starring) Jack DARCUS (who recently was the recipient of a $7500 grant-in-aid from the CFDC), and Morrie RUVINSKY's **She's a Woman*** (35mm and 16mm, b&w, 87 min.).

Elsewhere around the country, **The Rowdyman*** (produced by Lawrence DANE and directed by Peter CARTER; starring and scripted by Gordon PINSENT) has completed (Panavision) shooting in Newfoundland and is set to be released (via Budge Crawley's Film Canada) this spring.

And in Winnipeg, the government-backed Manitoba Development Corporation has (with $180,000) bought a 24% share of Omnitheatre Ltd., a firm founded by Dennis GALLAGHER that plans to produce television commercials, documentaries and even feature films. At the moment, Omnitheatre is releasing a film entitled **The Beginning of the End of the World** — narrated by Vincent PRICE — that is intended for planetarium showings.

And, at the National Film Board of Canada, Government Film Commissioner Sydney Newman has explained why a two-hour documentary (by Denys ARCAND, see also above) on the textile industry in Quebec will not be released. Mr. Newman, in a letter to the Confederation of National Trade Unions (which wants the film to be shown), explained that **On est au coton** "does not always adhere to factual truths". He criticized Arcand's film for mis-representing wages earned by Quebec textile workers, for giving the impression that workers become deaf through the use of old-fashioned looms, and for leaving viewers with the idea that the industry is largely foreign-owned. Newman added that it was ironic that the film should neglect "the problems of imports into Canada from countries where wage scales are considerably lower than our own." Arcand's subsequent feature-length NFB documentary. **Duplessis est encore en vie**, still has not been released by the Board.

Berlin Letter

After searching for two years for some way to screen Nazi-era propaganda films, the invitation came from the least expected source. I was sitting in the lobby of a Cracow hotel in the course of attending the city's annual short film festival, when a young East German director came by to practise his English. I blurted out my dismay in not being able to screen Nazi films in Germany (West or East), and my particular interest in examining how Goebbels wove religion into propaganda. He was more sympathetic than I imagined, and the next day informed me that the head of the East German delegation was interested in my project and wanted to meet me. I was introduced to Herbert Volkmann of the Staatliches Filmarchiv der DDR, and in my broken German explained my wishes again. To my surprise he asked how soon I could come.

My first reaction to the German propaganda films of 1933-45 was that they were of a higher quality (technically and in terms of acting) than I had imagined. Considering the golden period of German silents, and the traditional versatility of theater ensembles, there should have been no surprise at all. For some reason the word "propaganda" connotes crudeness — which isn't necessarily the case. Goebbels' definition of propaganda was simply to win the heart of a people and to keep it, and that meant plenty of entertainment and little direct haranguing. The capturing of enthusiasm in Riefenstahl's **The Triumph of the Will** (1934), and its clever integration with visual motifs and orchestrated movements, is the central power of the film — not the speeches at the end. It is, in a sense, a dream film — one that every German was required to see at least once.

Another remarkable quality is how close these early films are to the speech and the heart of the people. Two films of Hans Steinhoff use an attractive home-spun veneer to get across the key messages of hate and intolerance, **Hitler Youth Quex** (1933) blends scout uniforms, campfire ceremonies, songs, flag-waving, marching and mother-love into an argument for Nazi purity and cleanliness, while the Communists are dirty street-fighters, ruffians, drunks and bullies. Steinhoff's **Enemy of the People** (1937) (after Ibsen) features an ebullient, warm-hearted Heinrich George fighting greedy capitalists for the sake of the people. Noteworthy is the conversion of George from a drunken father in **Quex** to a kindly country doctor in **Enemy of the People.** He was to remain the dominant father image up to the last films of the war.

The most popular religious symbol is the church. In Peter Hagan's **Village in a Red Storm** (1935), a church is violated by drunken Russian soldiers singing orthodox hymns, and this is enough to incite a pacifistic pastor to go on a killing rampage. In Eduard von Borsody's **Wunschkonzert** (1940), a soldier on the Polish front saves his companions by playing the organ in a church and drawing enemy fire upon himself. In Veit Harlan's **The Great King** (1942), Otto Gebühr, playing Friedrich the Great, weeps over his countrymen in a light-splattered Gothic cathedral. And in Werner Klinger's **The Degenhardts** (1944) (about a family of organists) and Harlan's **Kolberg** (1944), the church is used both as a station of comfort and last-minute inspiration to win against the treachery of the invaders. The role of the pastor is also interesting. In Wolfgang Liebeneiner's **I Accuse** (1941), he is there to condone mercy-killing in the case of a housewife reduced to a helpless, crippled pulp by brain injury. It is depicted as an act of love rather than mercy, and this difficult-to-refute private argument closes the public's eye to the truth.

Nazi films were rich in entertainment.

arcmt 2021

Now available for 16mm bookings in Canada!

A film by Jacques Tati
(Mon Oncle and *Mr. Hulot's Holiday)*

"The masterpiece of laughter"
France-Soir
"Genius in its purest state"
Figaro Littéraire

Play Time

Colour, 114 min., English sub-titles, 1967

Also Available:

A TOUT PRENDRE (Take it All)
The first feature of Canadian director Claude Jutra, who's most recent film, *Mon Oncle Antoine,* swept the Canadian Film Awards. Black and white, 110 minutes, English sub-titles, 1963.

CALCUTTA
An Occidental look at one of the East's most fascinating cities, directed by famed French filmmaker Louis Malle (*Zazie dans le métro, Viva Maria, Murmur of the Heart*). "Without a doubt one of the most extra-ordinary filmic documents on the contemporary world. A film both terrible and unsettling"—Les Lettres Françaises. Colour, 97 minutes, English version, 1969.

From:
Faroun Films (Canada) Ltd. 136 St. Paul St. East, 2nd Floor, Montreal 127, Que.
Tel.: (514) 866-8831

2021

Wunschkonzert, for example, deals with a popular radio broadcast reaching to the front lines, features leading show people (Marike Rokk, the German Ginger Rodgers), has the inevitable wartime love triangle, and is sugar-coated with a baritone singing a dead soldier's last request to his mother (who is listening, tear-streaked, at the radio). It tugs at the heart even today, and was one of the most popular wartime films made.

The most surprising of the lot were the Jewish villification films. Hans Heinz Zerlott's **Robert and Bertram** (1939) centers on the anti-social antics of two Abbott and Costello characters, and ends with a parody of a Jewish masquerade ball that is sharp in comic overtones — and less cruel than a modern Forman film. The Jewish people come out more winners than losers. The same happens in Veit Harlan's **Jud Süss** (1944), in which the gifted actor Ferdinand Marian's portrait of a medieval Shylock makes him much more interesting and attractive than Heinrich George's dull-witted German prince. The film is said to have upset Goebbels because it should have been the other way around: the prince is the caricature instead of the Jew.

We are due for a re-evaluation of propaganda films on both sides of the front. Comparison of German and American propaganda would reveal strong similarities between, say, Norman Taurog's **Boys' Town** (1938) and Viktor de Kowa's **Head High, Johannes** (1941). These old films may possess little beyond historical value, but they are ready-made for relevant discussion of our past *and* present.

Ron Holloway

Toronto Letter

OF FILMS AND DINOSAURS

Every year the Canadian Film Awards receives more entries and gets bigger. Every year it involves a smaller and smaller part of Canadian cinema. The CFA is a dinosaur in the process of fossilization. The inbred Toronto clique that works hard to run the show doesn't (in the classic response of the ostrich) seem to realize it has a problem.

The Awards started off 23 years ago when there was precious little that could call itself a Canadian film. The only men making films were doing commercial shorts in the private industry or non-commercial shorts at the National Film Board. Every year these hardy souls got together for a drink and a little lonely back-slapping. The same men are getting together to slap the same backs today—only movies have changed.

The major reason the CFA is dying is the conspicuous absence of French-Canadians. The runaway winner of the Awards this year, **Mon Oncle Antoine**, was submitted by the NFB without asking director Claude Jutra (who would not have sent it). Despite bilingual applications and the periodic offer to hold the gala ceremonial dinner for one thousand in Montreal (if only someone there will do the job), the CFA is met with indifference. It may be too late to change that attitude.

However, the fact remains that the nice volunteers and poorly paid men who run the Awards haven't tried very hard.

Robert Daudelin (director of the Conseil Québécois pour la Diffusion du Cinéma) is the single most important liaison for Quebec cinema outside the province. (He recently organized a festival of Quebec films for the University of Toronto.) "Oh yes, I was at the CFA in 1969, but haven't gone since because there are few Quebec films. You know I didn't even know when it was being held this year until a week before. No one ever wrote or called me about Quebec participation.

"Since 1967 I think filmmakers here have decided that most festivals are no longer doing an important job. Either they should try to build new models involving filmmakers much more or they should close down. Also, it is hard to get filmmakers excited about the Awards when there are so many prizes—they don't mean much. It just doesn't seem very progressive." Daudelin said.

I asked the personable chairman of this year's Film Awards, Bob Crone, why Daudelin hadn't been contacted. He answered "Robert who?" (and took down the name and address of the Conseil).

The personal filmmaker is also excluded from the Film Awards by technicalities and, like the French-Canadian, oversight. The result is also indifference. After Morley Markson's **Zero the Fool** and David Cronenberg's **Stereo** were both barred from entry in the CFA a couple of years ago, an experimental category was created (there have always been categories like Best Non-feature Sound Re-recording). This year Murray Markowitz' feature **More Than One** was given a similar non-reception.

Markson says "I didn't enter my new film at the CFA because I didn't want to throw away another $35. The fact **Zero** won 7 awards in U.S. festivals and couldn't even get into the CFA is another example of what usually happens to adventurous Canadians in this country. Right now I think they would accept **Zero**, they've changed—but I don't really care anymore".

Apparently the CFA has also overlooked parts of the film establishment. The Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association — which has never been accused of adventurousness — claims never to have been consulted or asked to be involved in the CFA until money was needed. They refused to give.

Money is a major problem. The CFA cannot hire the necessary people full time to do what should be done on the $20,000 it scrounges each year. And even that figure is decreasing since the Canada Council is withdrawing support because of Quebec's non-involvement. This non-involvement is costing the CFA other potential sources of revenue. Michael Spencer of the Canadian Film Development Corp. has said that if the French were active in the CFA he doesn't see how the CFDC could avoid giving financial help (they don't now).

One bright spot in this murky picture is the strong possibility that the sponsored commercial short films (the backbone of the industry as they call themselves) will withdraw from the CFA to compete in their own separate festival. The number of awards are being reduced next year from 42 to 30.

This is a step in the right direction, but revolution rather than reform is needed if the Awards are to survive as more than a Toronto dinner with film clips. The CFA must involve the adventurous and the Québécois and the people who weren't born when it began. Perhaps then it will become a crossroads for filmmakers as well as film dealers and a marketplace for ideas as well as dollars. Perhaps then it will not need to model itself so closely on the Academy Awards stereotype for justification.

The men who are running it are well-meaning, but time is not on their side—nor are most of the filmmakers in this country.

Kirwan Cox

Kirwan Cox is one of the directors of the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, a Toronto-based outlet for independent cinema.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CURRENT SCENE

by HERMAN G. WEINBERG

It's not that Aldous Huxley's "The Devils of Loudon" could not have made an intriguing film, but where was the cinema's Huxley? Where, indeed? Certainly, Ken Russell, with his **The Devils**, based on the book, is not the one, not by a long shot. I never thought I'd see an uglier film than Fellini's **Satyricon** till this *passkutsvi* came along, which incomparable Polish epithet reminds me that Kawalerowicz did it with more believable zing in **Mother Joan of the Angels** a decade ago, remember?

Fellini does better with **The Clowns** (everything is grist to his mill) but his clowns aren't funny, if that's what clowns are supposed to be - not the current ones he has found nor the reincarnation of the old great ones, like the Fratellini Brothers, which he stages. There's one touching moment during which an old clown reminisces about the good old days, and Fellini's endings are always good, but I cannot help thinking what Eisenstein (who also doted on clowns and did marvelous sketches of them) could have done with such a subject, if this had been the best of all possible worlds.

And when it comes to films about children, no one can beat the French, or come anywhere near them, tho' the English have on occasion. From **Visages des Enfants** of Feyder to **La Maternelle** (Benoit-Levy), **Jeux Interdits** (René Clement) and **Les Quatres Cents Coups** (Truffaut), to name a quartet of top-flight ones, they have captured the

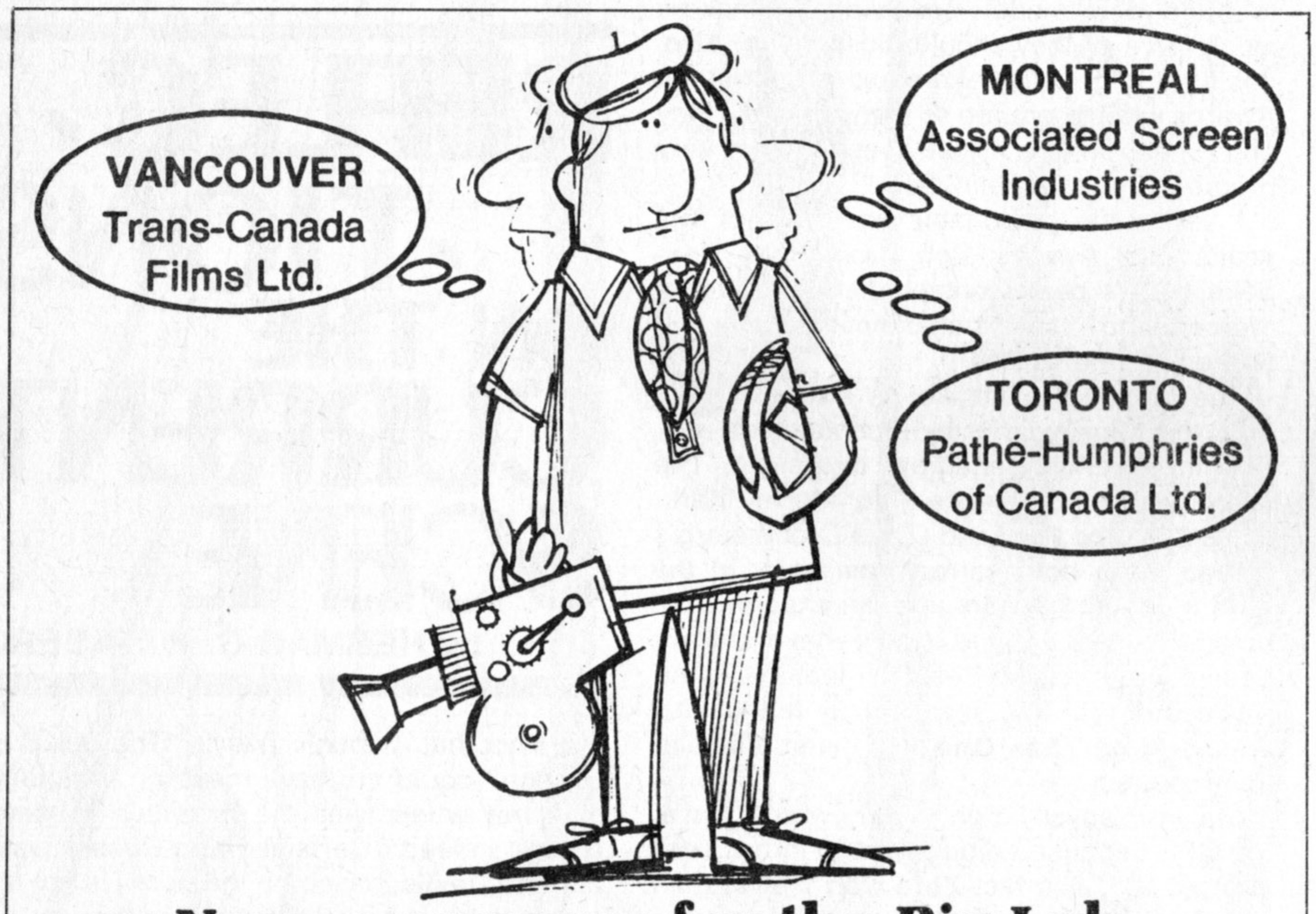
Herman G. Weinberg has contributed articles to most of the world's leading film journals, served on the juries of various film festivals, been US correspondent for Sight & Sound *as well as* Cahiers du Cinéma, *and published several books on the cinema.*

arcmt 2021

miracle of childhood as if their film were shot with hidden cameras. Such is not the case, alas, with **The Go Between**, a most earnest endeavor of Joseph Losey which is very camera conscious (being replete with "chic" camera angles that don't mean a thing—a high overhead shot of a boy crossing a hallway for absolutely no reason is only one of many; nor should I omit that irritating device, the zoom, used also and for no reason) but, most of all, committing that cardinal sin of actors being camera conscious. The *moues* of Julie Christie were for me insupportable, and a nice child, whose name I've forgotten, might have moved us as children like no one else can do, but Losey imposed artificial "direction" on him and so he doesn't move us. Besides, Losey doesn't know children, their mysteries, their secret worlds. He thinks he knows adults and thus shows us, head on, Miss Christie and her lover coupled. Doubtless, Mr. Losey's justification for this (besides the box-office come-on) is that it's vital to the story, to which I would reply that so was the seduction of Mizzi by Nicky in the old coach in the wine-garden in **The Wedding March**, but can you imagine Stroheim being as graphic as that about it? It boggles the mind to think of how gauche it would have looked — and it looks just as gauche today, for all the screen's "permissiveness." The true artist does not succumb to his own stimuli — I said it in "Saint Cinema" and I say it again. Even the American Film Institute's Catalogue of Feature Films, whose synopses are for the most part perfunctory, melts before the "scenes of a distilled ethereal beauty" in the wine-garden sequence of **The Wedding March**. But then, Stroheim *was* an artist. Like Lubitsch and Sternberg, he made of his audience connoisseurs, not voyeurs. (Besides, Losey's theme was already done, and better, much better, in Carol Reed's **The Fallen Idol** - remember?)

An example of a more recent artist is Eric Rohmer, whose **Claire's Knee** I have only just got around to seeing. Doubtless everyone's seen it by now, so just for the record I'd like to echo what so many others have already said about it - what a lovely film! What sensibility, what direction - so effortless that it almost effaces itself. There is almost no acting as acting, either, only some very personable people, with whom we spend a month of summer days by a Swiss lake until each solves his personal problem. Nothing happens, there's no story, just two hours of people talking it out, but the effect is like those psychological novels of Paul Bourget or a story by Remy de Gourmont. I award it my Blue Ribbon with Palms as the most exquisitely directed film since - since - **Les Quatres Cents Coups**. It may well be that the French film makers have the best staying power of them all. Rohmer's film is right as rain, as they say, and as salubrious. See it, if you haven't yet - it's good for your soul.

Finally, I'd like to recommend a book, a new film book, "A Discovery of Cinema" by Thorold Dickinson, that Oxford University Press has just issued both in London and New York. In a welter of film books it is a joy to come upon one (in this case a kind of condensed history and linking up of the developments, aesthetic, technical and commercial, that have shaped the world cinema) whose scholarship you can trust and that is utterly free of gobbledegook and pretentiousness, with no axes to grind, no personal hang-ups, no stylistic tics of any kind and, best of all, and hardest to do of all, a book that is not self conscious (that is, in which the author is not writing "a portrait of the author as a film critic") but sticks to the subject with a keenness and a happy knack for the felicitous turn of phrase that makes his observations delightfully fresh and original. If you don't think this is hard to do, at this late date, try it. Added to which the volume is handsomely gotten up and lavishly illustrated. All in all, as Joxer Daley (in *Juno and the Paycock*) would say, "A darlin' book, a darlin' book!"



Now–one name for the Big Lab in the Big Land

BELLEVUE-PATHÉ

Now, from east to west . . . it's Bellevue-Pathé. These proven labs offer truly integrated national services with highly skilled operations to provide everything from overnight dailies to release printing in all formats — including Eastman Colour (35, 16 and Super 8), Ektachrome (16mm, ECO-3 & ME-4) and Black and White (35 mm, 16 & 8). Plus the most advanced sound recording facilities.

For motion pictures or television . . . it's the big lab in the big land. Bellevue-Pathé, in Canada's major film centres!

BELLEVUE Pathé OF CANADA LTD.

VANCOUVER
916 Davie St.
Vancouver 1, B.C.
Tel. (604) 682-4646

TORONTO
9 Brockhouse Road
Toronto 14, Ont.
Tel. (416) 259-7811

MONTREAL
2000 Northcliffe. Ave.
Montreal 260, Que.
Tel. (514) 484-1186

LETTER FROM N.Y.C.

BOB COWAN

Under the direction of David Bienstock, the Whitney Museum has moved into the second season of its "New American Film Makers" series. The format consists only partly of experimental or "avant-garde" films. Also shown are many fine films that would not otherwise get a regular theatrical showing. Because of high interest in these films, the American Federation of Art has decided to circulate the various film programs, and make them available to its 600 member-institutions.

arcmt 2021

Last year, Richard Myers was represented by his film **Akran,** a fascinating impressionistic journey through personal memory and sexual pain. This year he has come up with an even more devastating and complex work, entitled **Deathstyles.** Both films suffer from excesses in length, and overloading of content, but having stated these weaknesses one can only marvel at the dazzling technical brilliance and powerful creative force at work in both of them.

Deathstyles contains multi-fragmented images and episodes strung together in a horizontal motion of continuous action that mo es like the relentless swinging of a giant sc he of death. It is a modern equivalent of "Dante's Inferno" . . . . a journey by car through the landscape of today. The various horrors are fashioned out of everyday scenes, and people from typical plastic towns and cities. The machine gun pacing of the film leaves little time for contemplation of individual scenes, but the accumulation of the total film is powerful, demonic and quite disturbing. New York contains hordes of pulpy repulsive people but **Deathstyles** reveals the disease to be more widespread. **Deathstyles** is full of their faces, ugly and suspicious, crouched in their automobiles like monsters in armor. Myers' film is a baroque death chant. At various times the tone of the film reminds me of Godard's highway crash scene in **Weekend** with its surreal nightmare mood. One of the most interesting aspects of **Deathstyles** is the constant use of image within image. Small movies and events appear on street billboards and signs, to help catalogue the journey of the protagonist's death, and the death of civilization itself. No need to invent images of Hell, they are all around us now. The staged sequences seem like fragments from some other epic in some other time; eternal, continuous, but related to the present. The sound track is cut much like the film . . . overlapping fragments of sounds and phrases run counterpoint to the images. The nightmare journey ends with the destruction of the hero — by his transference to a TV image which, in turn, had been transferred from movies of himself that were appearing more and more often in the setting and environments he was passing through. The final dehumanization; from living being to electronic image.

Far Out, Star Route (also shown at the Whitney) by Lenny Lipton is his most ambitious film to date. An elaborate home movie, with all the virtues and faults of the genre, it does manage to capture in its 70 minutes' running time the life styles of a group of his friends engaged in everyday pursuits during one summer. They take in the sun, goof around, swim, take drugs. A wedding is held in the fields; animals scurry about; the people enjoy the land and each others' company. The simplest of gestures and activities are focused upon with affection and care. The off-the-cuff shooting has discipline imposed on it in the final editing, where stills are combined with live action; 8mm inserts, in the form of split screen imagery, are also utilized.

There is something very euphoric about the life style of the people involved which, unfortunately, tends to become a bit tedious after a while, as an emptiness sets in. The film begins to wear as it becomes repetitious and meandering, without revealing anything new about the people. The so-called freedom they express seems to take on a feeling of being closed in, rather than one of being set free. There is a sense of suffocation. The protagonists' awareness of life seems to be based on the results of euphoric drugs more than on awareness achieved through disciplined consciousness. Their attitudes have a one-dimentional aspect, and what seems fresh and beautiful for the first half of the film turns into a self-indulgent monotony of vision. Lipton begins to intrude himself into the film more and more, and the sections of stoned sound track don't help matters any. There is a forced significance placed on scenes that really have none. What begins as an ode to the simple life becomes more like watching performers cracking nuts in a cage. The propaganda fails, but many individual images contain a simple poetry that makes one feel he is present at the occasion.

Bob Cowan

Bob Cowan is a prize-winning Canadian filmmaker now living and working in New York City.

BOOKS

Joris Ivens, **The Camera and I,** International Publishers, New York, 1969, 280 pp., Illustrated. $1.95, ($2.45 in Canada) Paper.

Joris Ivens, Dutch by birth if not by artistic sensibility, has been making films almost sixty years. The fifty films he has directed during those years illustrate not only his own experience and maturity as a filmmaker but also the history of the documentary film itself. A reflective account of his work is contained in these memoirs, finished in 1944 but remaining for the most part unpublished until recently. Postscripts bring the written record up to 1967.

Two early influences on Ivens were the avant garde movement and the Russian cinema. The Filmliga, which he helped organize in Holland, screened many of the avant garde films of the 1920s, the influence of which is seen in his earlier films such as **The Bridge** (1928) and **Rain** (1929). While Ivens was at least attracted by the forms of the avant garde it was the revolutionary substance of Russian cinema that proved more influential. Referring to Victor Turin's **Turksib** (1928), a powerful documentary on the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Ivens writes, "I could see how in a documentary film one could achieve the emotions of tension, conflict, and happiness, in the surmounting of difficulties." Ivens met the great Russian directors and theorists, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Vertov, and had much opportunity to analyze their films, including those of Dovzhenko. It was his disagreement with Vertov, in fact, that shaped the main direction of Ivens' filmmaking. Vertov's Kino Eye practice of assembling footage of real events into a nonnarrative format without unity of interpretation did not suit Ivens' conception of documentary. Nor did constant references to the camera, breaking the dramatic illusion that is important to the credibility of documentary. Moreover, staged or reenacted events, according to Ivens, were perfectly valid to deepen the content of films so

THE FACTS ABOUT
ABORTION
REFERRAL SERVICE

The New York State Abortion Act provides for the performance of abortions by licensed physicians in accredited hospitals and their affiliated out-patient clinics, up to and including the twenty-fourth week of pregnancy. There is no residency required for a therapeutic abortion and for those seventeen years or older, parental consent is not necessary.

The **Abortion Referral Service (ARS)** is a self-supporting organization whose function is to assist those women confronted with problem pregnancies. **ARS** makes all necessary arrangements with Board Certified obstetricians and gynecologists in fully accredited hospitals and clinics. This medical attention can be provided within 24 hours after your initial contact. If necessary, we will gladly assist in transportation arrangements.

For immediate confidential information and assistance, call:

ABORTION
REFERRAL SERVICE, INC.
Philadelphia 215-878-5800
8 A.M. to 10 P.M.
Seven days a week.

Please, don't delay! There is no need in today's world for illegal or expensive abortions.

Is your next production fully insured?

We can cover you against out-of-pocket expenses for losses due to:-
- Injury, Sickness or Death of members of cast
- Damage to: Props, Sets & Wardrobe, Miscellaneous Equipment, Third Party Property, Negative Film, Faulty Stock, Camera, Sound or Processing.
- Extra Expenses resulting from above
- Comprehensive Producers Liability including Errors and Omissions.

Contact: **SEYMOUR ALPER & CO.**
4141 SHERBROOKE ST. W., 5th FLOOR
MONTREAL, P.Q. 935-2673

INSURANCE BROKERS

FILM PRODUCTION INSURANCE IS OUR SPECIALTY.

arcmt 2021

long as the director's vision did not stray from the authenticity of his central subject. This position was of course rejected by Vertov.

Unfortunately Ivens' reputation as a Marxist propagandist has obscured the real significance of his art. His Marxism, genuine enough, derives strongly from contact with German intellectuals and workers during the disastrous Weimar Republic as well as from his work-tours in the Soviet Union. Ivens' **The New Earth,** not released until 1934, most clearly illustrated his dislike of capitalism and his growing Marxist outlook. A brilliantly edited film of clashing images, **The New Earth** shows the triumph of men and machines in the reclamation of the Zuidersee. As an illustration of capitalism's failure, however, he shows wheat being dumped into the sea at the height of the Great Depression, wheat from land salvaged from the Zuidersee destroyed to protect market prices—all this despite world hunger. Continuing along the same line in **Borinage** (1933), a film about the aftermath of a miners strike in Belgium, Ivens recorded proletarian poverty on the screen with the same severity and drama of Zola's novel *Germinal.* Critics have noted the "absence of interesting photography" in this film. But Ivens writes that the orthodox style of **Borinage** "was chosen deliberately and was determined by the decency and unrelieved plight of the people around us. We felt it would be insulting to people in such extreme hardship to use any style of photography that would prevent the direct honest communication of their pain to the spectator." Camera shots of dilapidated slums and filthy interiors, filmed with perfect balance of light and shadow, symmetry or composition might, Ivens believes, make poverty look picturesque rather than appalling. Ivens agrees with Paul Rotha that a slum should be a slum and should not, in a serious documentary, be filmed in a charming, sentimental manner.

Ivens' recollections of Ernest Hemingway and the making of **The Spanish Earth** (1937) form the most interesting chapter of this book though it has a certain vagueness that will annoy most readers. From one tragedy to another, Ivens went to Spain to make a film of the civil war, without exaggeration the artistic and political focal point of the 1930s. A group of well known American writers, among them Archibald MacLeish, Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker, Dos Passos, and Hemingway, founded "Contemporary Historians" for the purpose of producing a film about the Spanish conflict to raise money for ambulances for the beseiged Republican Government. Like many American intellectuals during the 1930s this group supported the Loyalists against the fascist revolt led by General Franco. Ivens met Hemingway in Madrid, as planned. Then one day, Ivens writes, he was part of the crew under no special arrangement; he helped with the general strategy of the filming and even assisted physically. "He showed a quick comprehension and understanding of the documentary film and a very helpful humility towards this new profession." Letting the images speak for themselves, Hemingway went on to write a commentary for the film remarkable for its terseness. Later, Hemingway spoke the commentary, after a less then satisfactory reading by Orson Welles. Hemingway appeared with the film on several occasions, once with Ivens before the Writers Congress in Carnegie Hall in 1937 even before the sound track had been finished; at the White House when a special preview was given to President and Mrs. Roosevelt; and in California at the official premiere.

Ivens does not indicate who wrote the first script of **The Spanish Earth,** only referring to him as "one of our committee in New York." In any case, it was a preconceived script written away from the scene of action; it had to be changed to suit the conditions encountered by Ivens. Dos Passos worked with Ivens for a while in Spain, but Ivens is also vague on this subject. He fails to mention the disagreement between Dos Passos and Hemingway on a suitable approach to the film. Dos Passos, according to Carlos Baker, wanted to stress the predicament of common people in the midst of war; Hemingway seemed more interested in the military aspects yet not discounting the humanitarian side. The finished film appeared to be a compromise.

Because presumably few persons have seen this film in recent years, it is worth describing in some detail. In the village of Fuenteduena on the outskirts of Madrid the peasants work recently-confiscated lands for the common good. The images of them are sharp and harsh, like the Spanish landscape, dry and flat around Madrid. Peasant women dressed in black wait in line to purchase bread. A close-up shows the letters UGT stamped on the crust, initials of the socialist trade union. The fascists advance toward Madrid but are stopped in the area of the university, whose devastated appearance anticipates the urban destruction of World War II. The sound track is filled with the threatening staccatto of machine guns, interrupted only by occasional bomb blasts. The People's Army prepares to meet the attackers. "Men cannot act before the camera in the presence of death," Hemingway says in a strong, manly voice. The film goes on to make several principal propaganda points: the people are united behind the Republican Government and are resolutely determined to resist the fascist rebellion aided by Hitler and Mussolini. The terror bombing scenes of Madrid show people running for shelter across wide streets and plazas. A close-up shows the blood-soaked corpse of a bookkeeper "who had nothing to do with the war." The image of a dead woman with her dead infant cradled in her arm lingers on. The bombardment, we are told, increases the solidarity of the people and speeds up recruitment. The Madrilenos maintain order in their city; the peasants of Fuenteduena still work the land. A German Junker is shot down. The wreckage of the downed plane is closely examined by the camera. Disfigured corpses of Italian soldiers sent by Mussolini are also shown in detail. The evidence of foreign intervention is unmistakable. The resolve of the Loyalists, aided by Russian tanks, is shown during the counterattack near Jarama. The wounded require medical assistance—and ambulances.

The Spanish Earth is not a retrospective documentary made years after, such as Frederic Rossif's brilliant film compilation, **To Die in Madrid** (1963). It was frankly a contemporary statement meant to enlist sympathy for the Loyalists. Just as the memoirs misrepresent Soviet policies during the civil war, the film deliberately conceals the antagonism within the Spanish Left. **The Spanish Earth,** nevertheless remains a classic propaganda film, primarily because of its editing—the way it attracts and excites the interests of the viewer and gradually brings his thoughts and emotions up to the personal, social, and political point of view of the filmmaker. It was with good reason that many filmmakers employed by the U.S. Government during World War II, including Frank Capra, studied **The Spanish Earth** to gain some insight into the art of persuasion through the use of film.

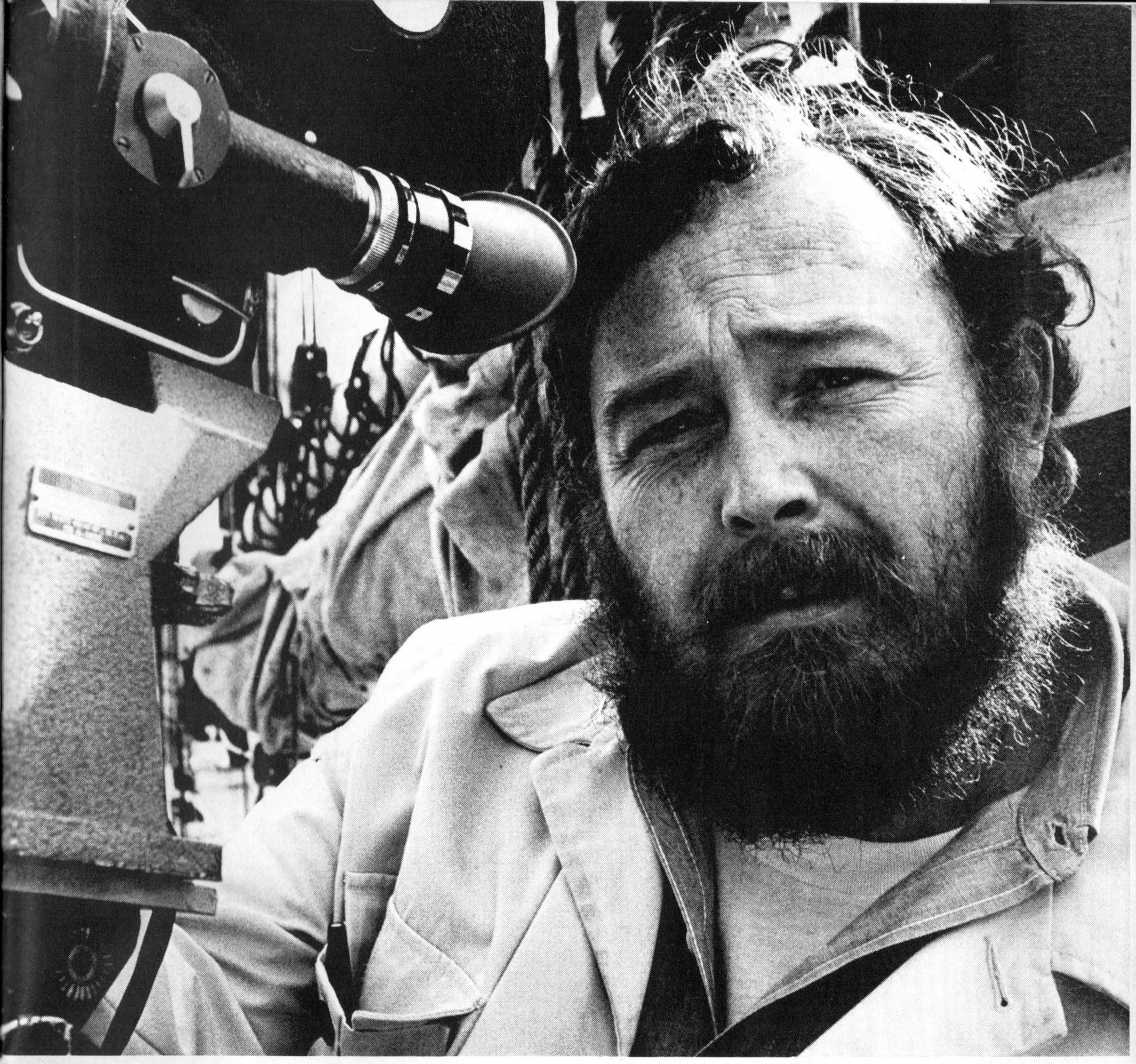
Confronted by victorious fascists in Spain and by the Japanese in China during his production of the **Four Hundred Million** (1939), Ivens could feel, before many, the closeness of a second world war. From 1939 through the war Ivens worked in the United States and Canada directing such films as **Our Russian Front** (1941) with Lewis Milestone, **Action Stations** (1943), and **Power and the Land** (1940). This latter film, made before U.S. entry into the war, compares favorably with Pare Lorentz's epic documentaries, **The Plow that Broke the Plains** (1936) and **The River** (1937) and with Robert Flaherty's indictment of rural poverty in America, **The Land** (1941), all important films produced for the U.S. Government under Roosevelt. What seems remarkable about **Power and the Land** is Ivens' uncanny ability to capture the spirit of rural America though he himself a rather urbane foreigner. With all elements taken together, **Power and the Land** best illustrates Ivens' dictum that in filmmaking you have to show what you want to say—"the writing, the words, are part of the interplay with pictures, sound, music, brought together in an editing that changes the qualities of every component."

Ivens' films, like those of Eisenstein and Leni Riefenstahl, have too often been dismissed on frivolous charges of propaganda as though that settled everything. Ivens has done nothing less than to dramatize the struggle of men in relation to their political and economic milieu. The unifying theme of his cinema life has been his identification with what he understood as progressive movements around the world—from the strikers in Borinage, the Loyalists in Spain, the masses of China, even in some respects the New Deal, and more recently the Cuban and Vietnamese movements for national liberation. Because of these associations and his work in communist nations, his reputation in the west has not prospered, nor have his films been given the distribution and attention they deserve, although now he is enjoying a revival in Holland under the efforts of the Netherlands Filmmuseum. This book may not ensure his place in film history—for his films have done that—but it does have the unusual advantage of illustrating the serious intellect and purpose behind his documentary craft and behind his cameras, which have filmed much that is violent in the history of this unfortunate century.

William T. Murphy

William T. Murphy is a film archivist for the National Archives in Washington, and holds a master's degree in history from the American University.

2021



"We weren't looking for awards ... but as soon as we saw the rushes, we all felt we had a winner ... and as it turned out, we were right ... I worked harder on that film than any I've ever shot ... maybe it's because I had more freedom ... the director trusted my judgment and used me as his eyes and sounding board ... we pored over movies and stills for months, looking for that flat, shallow effect in the images ... I used special lenses to capture the same kind of visual texture on film ... and we took no chances with film quality, either ... we used the total Eastman Color System throughout—from first negs to final release prints ... and this included Eastman's technical help whenever we needed it ... and it really paid off—not only at the festivals, but at the box office ... and that's what it's all about ..."

Motion Picture & Education Markets
Canadian Kodak Co., Limited
3500 Eglinton Ave. W.,
Toronto 15, Ont.

Kodak

arcmt 2021

MRS P GRAHAM MJ72
3510 MOUNTAIN ST-43-
MONTREAL PQ
S922R

now shooting

When Michael Calls
Mahoney's Estate
Jalna
Golden Apples of the Sun
Dr. Simon Locke

now editing

Montreal Blues
The Rowdyman
Vie Revée

now playing

Face Off
Loving and Laughing
Foxy Lady
Heads or Tails

FILMHOUSE

Home to the Experienced Professional Producers

22 Front St. W./Toronto 1, Ontario/416 363-4321